

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2013 • cjr.org

CRONKITE'S "THAT'S THE WAY IT IS" NO LONGER APPLIES.

the quality
control for
information

About addressing what's true
and what's false.

for telling the truth
of ourselves to ourselves.

a journalist
is
first and
foremost a
questioner.

To
inform and
enlighten;
to expand the
dialogue;
to probe and
provoke;
to
stimulate
and engage;
to show the way
present
or
another.

JOURNALISM

for those who don't understand
the question or the answer...

The world is a blur.
Journalism is a
SUPERCONDUCTOR.

An activity,
not a
profession.

IS
A tool,
a
form,
and
rum

THE IMMUNE SYSTEM OF DEMOCRACY...
NOT FUCKING ROX



telling people that
they don't know about
the world.

now even using a journalist
can hear is "wait, what?"

for truth.

Beyond being a beautiful job, journalism is a state of mind.)

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JOURNALISM THAT REVEALS SOLUTIONS AS IT UNCOVERS PROBLEMS.

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COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

September/October 2013

"To assess the performance of journalism... to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent."

—from the founding editorial, 1961



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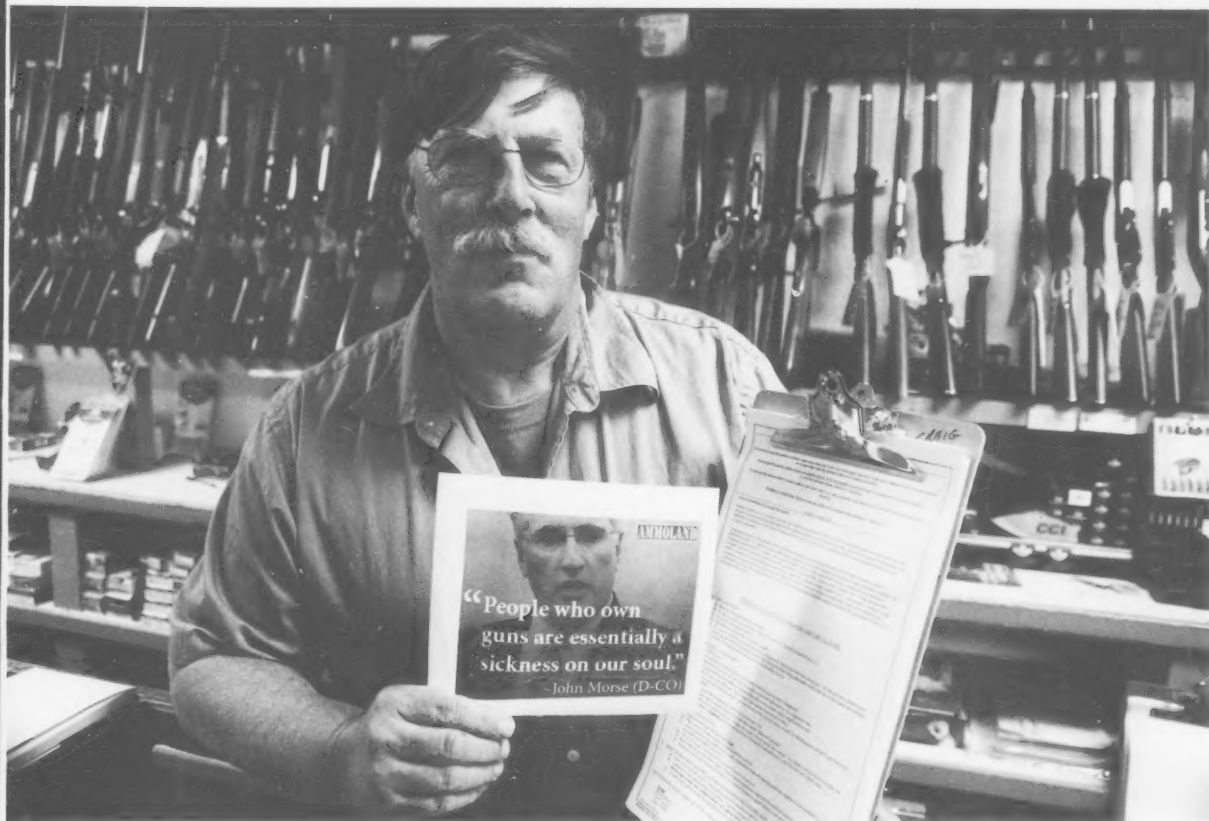
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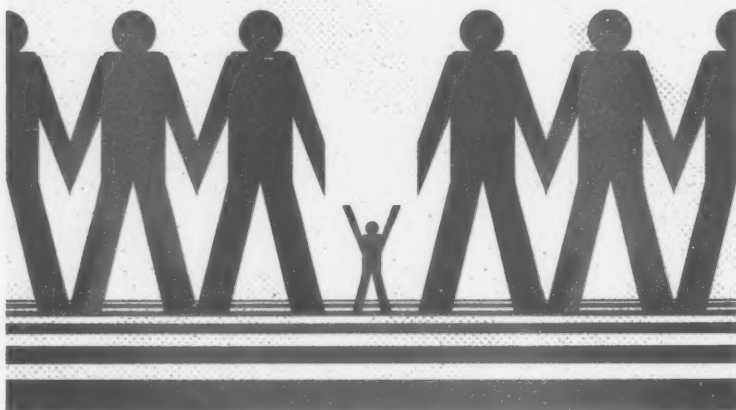
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Opening Shot



In the nine months since the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School, the rekindled debate over gun control has remained in the headlines. Congress failed to pass new gun-control legislation, but several states pushed through tighter restrictions, prompting gun manufacturers in some of those states to relocate; seven states made it legal for teachers and administrators to carry firearms at school; and a bunch of mayors, led by New York's Michael Bloomberg, are working to punish the four Democratic senators who voted against the gun bill in Congress. But arguably the most important post-Sandy Hook moment is scheduled for September 10, when Coloradans will decide whether to recall state Senate President John Morse, and fellow Senator Angela Giron, for their role in passing a law requiring universal background checks and limiting ammunition magazines to 15 rounds. For years, the National Rifle Association has used the threat of political retribution to keep lawmakers from giving the public the gun regulation that it repeatedly says it favors. Whichever way the vote goes, it will send a powerful message to politicians at all levels. **CJR**

Revenge Paul Paradis, who owns Paradise Firearms in Colorado Springs, holds a petition to recall state Senate President John Morse over his support for a strict new gun law.



Divided we fall

Journalism matters; it's time to start acting like we believe it

In the July/August issue of *CJR*, Francesca Borri wrote a powerful essay about the plight of being a freelancer, and a woman, covering the Syrian civil war for Italian media. The reaction to her piece was impassioned and global. As of August 6, it had drawn 390,000 pageviews, making it the most-viewed piece ever on *CJR.org*. News outlets in Poland, Germany, Portugal, France, and elsewhere asked to reprint it. Borri got offers to write for better money. But

mostly there was heartfelt concern and gratitude, from some fellow journalists and a great many non-journalists.

Borri's piece was less well received in Italy, where some journalists were rankled by the shameful picture of Italian journalism that Borri described: \$70 per story; no institutional support; no interest in complexity and nuance; no sense of collegiality or common cause. In published responses, tweets, and emails, she was called a narcissist, a spoiled child, a naïf, a snob, and a fake, and accused of exploiting the Syrians' suffering for personal gain. A weekly asked her to pose topless. Borri felt compelled to produce signed testimonials to support a few of her claims.

Some of this is peculiar to Italy. But what Borri was talking about—the devaluation of journalism—is not just an Italian problem. A freelancer in the US market could have done her own version of this story, and rankled colleagues here. The differences in the response to Borri's piece are telling. The civilians tended to share her outrage, while Italian journalists implicated in the devaluing lashed out defensively.

A deep insecurity now haunts the profession. The devaluation of journalism is about more than just the corrosive write-for-free ethos that took hold over the last decade, as the business model broke down. Journalism lost its virtual monopoly as the arbiter of the public conversation, and with it a bit of its swagger. This shift brought plenty of good along with the bad, but journalists who had been inspired to enter the field by Walter Cronkite and Woodward & Bernstein found themselves derided as the “MSM,” shorthand for *so last century*. We have internalized, to varying degrees, the idea that maybe what we do *doesn't* matter all that much.

Freelancers have always had to deal with indifferent or abusive editors, and hustle to make even a modest living. But there are more freelancers today, and they are relied upon to cover more important stories—especially in far-flung hotspots like Syria—as the big media outlets have dramatically reduced their ambitions generally, and on foreign coverage specifically. Borri notes that editors can stick to the \$70-per-story fee because there is always someone willing to take it, which suggests that part of the freelancers' plight is a matter of market forces. But the failure of journalism's gatekeepers to support them—in legacy newsrooms or startups—says something about industry morale broadly, not just about the economics.

Those Italian editors and reporters (including a number of fellow freelancers) who sought to discredit Borri surely are aware that journalism, as a profession, is in a funk. But when confronted with someone who forcefully points this out, they chose to cling to their toehold in the status quo rather than risk speaking out. They sought to tear down one of their own rather than stand in solidarity with her and confront a problem that affects us all. Had the target of Borri's critique been US newsrooms, would the response have been markedly different? Maybe not.

Borri, whose father's family owns real estate, was accused of slumming in Syria on daddy's dime. It's a valid question whether increasingly only freelancers of independent means can afford to go cover these important stories. But that has nothing to do with Borri's motivation. Why was she risking her life in this hellish place if she didn't have to? Maybe because, as she writes, people want to understand the world, not just be fed a diet of superficial mayhem and simplistic “analyses.” In other words, she believes that what journalists do—and don't do—matters. **CJR**

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INFORMING THE NEWS

The Need for Knowledge-Based Journalism

THOMAS E. PATTERSON

A frank look at the failings of today's journalism and what needs to be done to fix the problem. As the journalist Walter Lippmann noted nearly a century ago, democracy falters "if there is no steady supply of trustworthy and relevant news." Yet, today's journalists too often give equal weight to facts and biased opinion, stir up small controversies, and serve up infotainment.

Information is the lifeblood of democracy. Public opinion and debate suffer when citizens are misinformed about current affairs, as is increasingly the case. Though the failures of today's communication system cannot be blamed solely on the news media, they are part of the problem, and the best hope for something better.

As a corrective, Patterson proposes "knowledge-based journalism." In this book, derived from a multi-year initiative of the Carnegie Corporation and the Knight Foundation, Patterson calls for a major overhaul of journalism education and practice. *Informing the News* speaks not only to journalists, educators, and newsmakers but to all who are concerned about the integrity of the information on which America's democracy depends.

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Power of the punchline

Thanks for your article, Dannagal G. Young ("Lighten up," *CJR*, July/August). One thing you fail to mention: Satire actually gets political results. Congress passed the 9/11 firefighters/police health bill thanks to the efforts of *Daily Show* outrage. Over several days, Jon Stewart and staff hammered at the topic, and the legislation soon got passed.

I also find the Stewart/O'Reilly conversations to be not only entertaining but enlightening. Stewart does not pull punches with O'Reilly, nor does O'Reilly fail to take on Stewart. True political discourse of political differences.

Barry

Comment posted on CJR.org

Voice of America?

It is disappointing that *CJR* would publish Gary Thomas' commentary on the Voice of America ("Mission impossible," *CJR*, July/August), which contains multiple errors, and calls for changes that are either unrealistic or have already been proposed by the very organization Thomas maligns.

VOA's website demonstrates we are a hard-hitting and effective international multimedia news organization. Our audience numbers have never been higher. They are based on VOA's credibility as an independent news organization. In Africa, we are big on radio and mobile. In Iran, one in five adults watch us every week on TV. There is nothing "schizophrenic" about what we do.

VOA produces dozens of television programs, has nearly 50 separate websites and a wide range of mobile platforms, in addition to radio, podcasts, and social media. Audiences look to VOA for accurate and balanced news they cannot get on state-controlled media in many countries, and we provide that in more than 40 languages.

Kyle King

*Director, VOA Public Relations
Washington, DC*



'I know people who risked their lives for VOA. Their tradition of public service means nothing to those now in charge.'

I worked at VOA longer than Gary Thomas—35 years—and I agree with him 100 percent. Thomas made one small error: Sanford Ungar came *before* David Jackson, not after him. From the time I started in 1971 until Jackson became director in 2002, the news division was protected from higher-ups and allowed to write under the VOA Charter—accurate, objective, and comprehensive. We covered Watergate, Iran-Contra, the Clinton impeachment and other controversial issues fully and fairly because we were not the Voice of the Executive Branch; we were the Voice of the American people. I produced Opinion Round-ups, and I went out of my way to find comments critical of American policy as well as comments in agreement. It never occurred to me to do anything else—because I was a VOA professional. A friend of mine was the news division chief under Jackson and he finally resigned

rather than accept Jackson's attempts to censor and manipulate the news product. Under USIA, VOA correspondents abroad did not answer to the local US ambassador. Their copy went straight to Washington for editing. The Broadcasting Board of Governors was, is, and will be the instrument for the destruction of a precious national resource. I know good people who risked their lives to cover the news for VOA. I knew good people who died on the job. Their tradition of public service means nothing to those now in charge. I wish someone with the power to change things at VOA gave a damn.

Anthony C. Collins
Reston, VA

While I may not agree with every proposal of Gary Thomas (though many are on point), I am appalled as a member of the Broadcasting Board of Governors over the arrogant refusal of VOA to answer Thomas's questions. It is so contrary to the purpose of VOA in bringing different views on issues to the public. The response seems similar to what repressive regimes say when VOA or other news groups ask for comments.

As one governor, I apologize. I ask David Ensor, head of VOA, to respond how this has happened. He is a former journalist and surely he was unaware that this has happened. His challenge is preventing another episode like this.

Victor Ashe
Knoxville, TN

Cris de coeur

Francesca Borri, I'm so impressed with your article "Woman's work" (*CJR*, July/August). Even though, through my work and constant follow-up, I am quite well informed about the situation in Syria, your personal view and experiences of the war have really touched me. It even made me cry! I really wish you will stay safe, and I do wish the same to those poor people in Syria, most of whom have

A black and white portrait of Sean Parker, a man with a beard and mustache, wearing a dark sweater over a collared shirt. He is sitting in a large, tufted leather chair, looking off to the side with a serious expression. His right hand is resting on his lap, and his left hand is visible at the bottom of the frame, resting on a wooden surface.

Make more than money. Make history.

SEAN PARKER, SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR, FORBES COVER OCTOBER 2011.

Forbes

Change the world.

no way to get out and no other place to go! You are so close to us in Jerusalem and yet so far away... Wishing you good luck and a better editor—if there are any!

Annika Khano
Jerusalem, Israel

As an Italian freelancer, I offer all my support to Francesca. I suppose she works for the same newspaper I write for, and I can confirm her every word. When I was detained in Pakistan, I didn't get any support, not even an email from colleagues; they wrote an article about the story three days later and only because other media were covering the story. Eventually, I got out of trouble just because the editor in chief of *Limes* (an Italian review of geopolitics) did everything in his power to get me the hell out of there. And yes, nobody is forcing us to do this job: But it is our job; we love it, and we try to do it at its best and with all the intellectual honesty we can.

Francesca Marino
Rome, Italy

Your piece was shattering. Glenn Greenwald and Amy Goodman have spoken highly of a reader-supported model, and I would pay you for your more in-depth pieces that try to understand the situation in Syria. I imagine that is true for the other people sending you a "dozen emails" that ask for understanding instead of blood. This may not be enough to buy you a fixer, but I wonder if it may help you get out the kinds of stories you want. Stay alive, stay sane(ish).

Ben Simpson
Cambridge, NY

I just read your shocking piece on freelancing in war-zone Syria. I've been working as a freelancer for 32 years; I worked as a political correspondent in a normal country, with no wars, no serious problems, etc. And every single word you write about being treated so poorly by editors who show little interest is a *déjà vu*. I would never have believed that editors would react with just as much ignorance, egotism, ruthlessness, to you in a war zone as they would to those of us who report from the comfort of a peaceful city in a peaceful country.

I wrote about Marie Colvin when it happened, and am acquainted with Paul

Conroy, the photographer who survived badly injured. You all have my deepest respect for what you do.

Your piece is brilliant and incredibly vital to opening the eyes of people who romanticize war-zone reporting. You're very courageous to publish this. I sincerely thank you for your bravery and will promote it as much as I can to my international readers.

Wishing you safety foremost,
Jens M. Lucke
Grasberg, Germany

Francesca, thank you for your piece. I am not a journalist, just a reader. But hopefully one of the bright ones, wanting simplicity, but not oversimplification, analysis rather than emotion. There is a dearth of credible and intelligent work, indeed, on what is happening in Syria. What I see in the news is simplistic and panders to readers' fears and stereotypes. I do not know how to change a broken market for mass media, unfortunately. I wish you a lot of success and luck in your daily work.

Leonid
Amsterdam, Netherlands

People like Francesca make this world a little more understandable and people like you editors make that journalism work closer to ours, the readers. Thank you very much for publishing it, and I really hope that I can read more articles of true criticism toward an issue that affects us all. Good job!

J. Bernie Reyes
Mexico City, Mexico

Francesca, your story "Woman's work" was the clearest description I've ever read of what a war zone is like. Part of the clarity for me, I'm sure, is knowing that a woman wrote it and being able to see through your eyes instead through a man's. Thank you. So much of what we see in the media here in the States is so dumbed down and sanitized that it's like looking at something through frosted glass: There's something there, but we can't quite see the real shape and size. I've been reading a lot about the human need for stories as a way of communicating and connecting, relatable stories in which you can picture yourself as part of the narrative. Your piece put me in the

streets next to you and made me see it in a personal way instead of as an abstract concept. Thank you! Stay safe.

Shawna Job
Portland, OR

My ex-husband sent this article to me with the words *read this*. I have, and am now in tears with my first cup of coffee. I am feeling frustration, angst, fear, and overwhelming empathy. I used to say that if I could touch just one person with my photographs to make them want to know more, then I've done my job. Now, at those dinner parties, having limped in feeling every old injury, I usually, by the end, tell someone I don't know why I bothered—they couldn't give a damn.

Carlee Keppler-Carson
Palmer Lake, CO

A Fox in the henhouse

Jim Sleeper's commentary on Zev Chafets's book about Roger Ailes (CJR, July/August) repeats the legend that the Fox News president "crafted" the notorious "Willie Horton" ad. However, as Martin Schram wrote in *The New Republic* ("The Making of Willie Horton," May 28, 1990), the honors go to Larry McCarthy, a former Ailes Communications executive, who by then worked for a PAC called Americans for Bush and who devised the media campaign that included the Horton ad. Not only was Ailes not involved, by law AFB could not contact or coordinate with the Bush campaign.

Schram's article details how McCarthy conceived the ad, even selecting the mug shot, and worked his way around the network censors, then snookered the talk shows to pick up the story as well. Given that McCarthy's role in negative campaigning during the Bush (and subsequent) presidential race has been discussed as recently as a 2012 *New Yorker* article (Jane Mayer, "Attack Dog," Feb. 13, 2012), one has to wonder about the accuracy of the rest of Chafets's reporting.

Mike Buetow
Amesbury, MA

Clarification

In Sabra Ayres' story "Future tense," (CJR, July/August), we wrote that Afghanistan's "illiteracy rates hover around 39 percent for men and 13 percent for women." We meant "literacy rates." **CJR**

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—The Wall Street Journal

"LOVE HIM OR HATE HIM,"
Ed Koch was New York in the 1980s."
—The Village Voice

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Currents



Open Bar Local Edition

San Francisco, CA

Year opened 2012

Owners Future Bars, a.k.a. Doug Dalton and Brian Sheehy

Distinguishing features Located in the basement of the Hearst building, where the *San Francisco Examiner* was published, it's filled with old typewriters, printing presses, and the front pages of local newspapers from historic events, like the US declaration of war in 1941, the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge, and Nixon's resignation. The building was damaged in the 1906 earthquake, and the next day three local papers came together to publish a single issue. A copy signed by the collaborators is on display near the bar's entrance.

Who drinks here Proximity to both the financial district and the startup-heavy South of Market neighborhood makes it a happy-hour destination for young, well-heeled tech types. But journalists can be found here, too—the Center for Investigative

Reporting celebrated its award-winning “Broken Shield” series (which exposed police abuse and corruption) at Local Edition, and left the George Polk Award plaque behind for the bar to display.

Signature drink Like its sister bars, Local Edition is famous for craft cocktails. But most every drink here is a shout out to a Hearst publishing tradition, like the eponymous Local Edition, a twist on the Old Fashioned, with orange-peel syrup and cherry-infused bitters.

On the record All the tables and countertops in the bar are made of leftover Italian marble from Hearst Castle, and the projector in the corner belonged to William Randolph

Off the record A tunnel connects Local Edition to Cask, Future Bars' artisanal liquor store next door. The passageway is currently off limits, but Dalton and Sheehy say they may open it to customers in the future.

—Nathan Hurst is a writer in San Francisco

Got a bar you love? Send recommendations for this feature to openbar@cjr.org.

Language Corner Nuclear attainment

An editorial discussed Iran's "determined program to attain nuclear-weapons capacity." Later, it cited pressure on Iran "to halt its aggressive program to attain a nuclear bomb."

What Iran is trying to do is "attain" nuclear capacity so it can "obtain" a nuclear bomb.

"Attain" and "obtain" both have the sense of "getting" something. But "attain" has embedded in it the sense of a goal that is reached through some effort; "obtain" carries more a sense of "procuring."

Garner's *Modern American Usage* calls both "attain" and "obtain" "formal words," used in "an elevated level of diction."

Garner's calls the mixup a malapropism, or a misuse with a humorous result, like saying "she was under the affluence of her sugar daddy" instead of "influence."

Most misuses of "attain" or "obtain" are not funny, simply because they are "wrong" only to a matter of degree. If you spent years and hundreds of dollars before you finally got that Derek Jeter rookie baseball card, you might say, "When I finally obtained that Jeter card, I attained the status of the greatest baseball-card collector." You obtained a physical thing, and thus attained a milestone or goal.

Few people will misunderstand if you misuse either one. But if you're going to play at an "elevated level of diction," you should at least try to fit in.

—Merrill Perlman



Stranger Than Fiction The new niche: gangsters

Yamaguchi-gumi, Japan's largest yakuza crime syndicate, has published an official magazine that features satirical haikus and genteel articles about angling. In response, we present highlights from the Corleone family newsletter.

- » Fine Dining: Clemenza shares his famous spaghetti-sauce recipe. Because you might have to cook for 20 guys some day.
- » How to house-sit: for when you've gotta go to the mattresses
- » Exclusive photos from Connie and Carlo's wedding
- » The Godfather's gardening tips: getting tomatoes just right
- » Special offer on cannoli at Pitelli's bakery. Ask for Enzo.

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—Edirin Oputu

Hard Numbers

55

percent of American voters identified Edward Snowden as a "whistleblower" in July 2013

34

percent of American voters identified Snowden as a "traitor" in July 2013

40

days that journalists camped in the Moscow airport while Snowden waited for asylum

33

percent of Hong Kong residents consider Snowden "a hero"

956,107

YouTube views of "citizen journalism" video of arrest caught with Google Glass as of August 5

2

months' (April and May 2012) worth of AP journalists' phone records that the Justice Department seized in 2012

1,811

uses of the phrase "post racial" in English-language news media in the year after Barack Obama's election in 2008

268

uses of the phrase "post racial" in English-language news media in the two weeks following the July 13 verdict in the Trayvon Martin case.

Sources: Quinnipiac University, *The Guardian*, *South China Morning Post*, YouTube, AP.org, LexisNexis



3,347 TWEETS 1 FOLLOWING 1,824,237 FOLLOWERS Follow

Tweets

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 22
Gather followers. I present a new genre with all the tenets of fiction and the energetic information of an incessantly updated Twitter feed
Expand

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 22
All tweets originate in official records or transcribed verbatim from the innards of the author's mousetrap memory. We begin!
Expand

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 22
The village of Holcomb stands on the high wheat plains of western Kansas. These silos look like Greek temples:
pic.twitter.com/ROLLINGHILLS
Expand

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 22
Until one morning in November of 1959, few Americans—in fact, few Kansans—had ever heard of Holcomb. Polit: Have YOU heard of it? 2/546,098
Expand

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 22
"Good grief, Kenyon. I hear you!" Barefoot, pajama-clad, Nancy Clutter scampered down the stairs. (@NewYorkerFactCheck: I see dead people)
Expand

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 22
Outside, a black Chevrolet rolled quietly into the shadows. Inside? Sheriff Dewey, a.k.a. @Pappy thinks Bobby Rupp, boyfriend 853/546,098
Expand

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 23
Perry rather dashinglly recalls: "I thought he was a very nice gentleman. I thought so right up to the moment I cut his throat." 986/546,098
Expand

Phillip K. Tompkins @PhillyK Jan 24
By insisting that "every word" is true @CapoteIRL has made himself vulnerable to those readers and made both a tactical and a moral error
 Retweeted by Truman Capote
Expand

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 24
Phil Tompkins is just jealous
Expand

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 24
@PhillyK As an orange is final! An orange is something nature has made just right. @CapoteIRL is orange. Tiresome; @MonroevilleGal bring gin!
Expand

Truman Capote @CapoteIRL Jan 25
@PerrySmithJustice I just can't quit you
Expand

Gaming Playing for keeps

Looking for a new way to involve readers in your stories? Get them to play games.

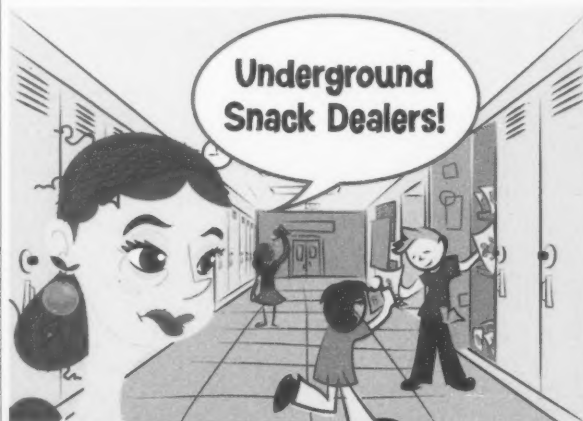
The Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR) is launching its first videogame, *Hair Net Hero*, to teach children how to eat more healthfully at school. Aimed at third graders, the game revolves around a school-lunch lady and her valiant attempts to get kids to eat healthy meals. "It's part of our strategy of trying to take our big investigative work—and a lot of great data reporting that happens here—and translate that for different audiences," said Meghann Farnsworth, who manages distribution and community building for CIR. Children aren't likely to read a long article on nutrition or watch the evening news, "but they may want to play with a game, and that same information that we could get across in an investigation can come through in that way."

Hair Net Hero is just one of an innovative new breed of news games that explain difficult issues by immersing players in stories. At the nonprofit website Games for Change, you can see what it's like to run a sweatshop, become an on-the-ground reporter in Darfur or Haiti, or manage a newspaper under a totalitarian regime.

Sweatshop is especially addictive. Developed by Littleloud and funded by UK broadcaster Channel 4, the game offers a blackly comic look at offshore manufacturing. Players rush to complete increasingly high quotas of bags, shirts, and shoes before workers are injured or die of dehydration—and it's all set to cheery techno music.

CIR's new game is nowhere near as grim, and is part of the organization's continuing effort to engage children through play: CIR also features a Junior Watchdogs section on its website for young users and has released a coloring book. *Hair Net Hero* was co-produced with Coco Studios, and will be hosted online, on tablets, and by iPhone and Android devices. CIR also hopes to work with schools and other groups to distribute the game and an accompanying activity book to children in California.

—Edirin Oputu



Busted! *Hair Net Hero* is part of a new breed of news games.



What's In My...Bags

Alexia Tsotsis

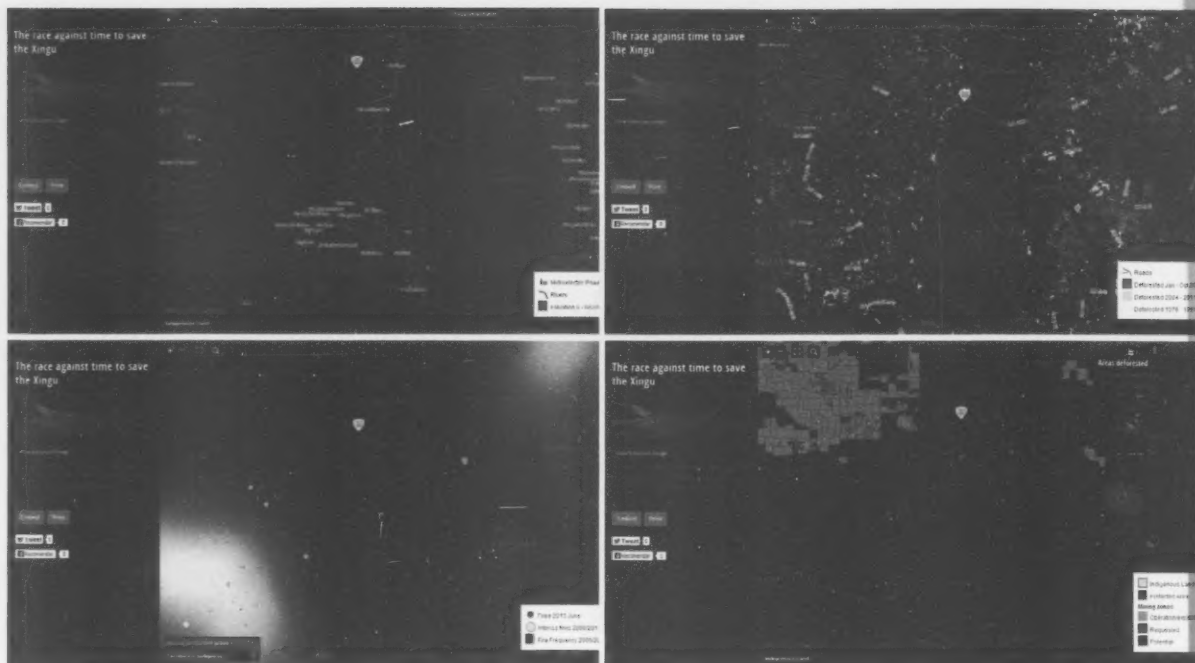
Alexia Tsotsis carries bags inside her bags. The 31-year-old San Francisco co-editor of TechCrunch carries enough stuff with her "in case I'm walking down the street and someone says 'You need to be in New York right now.' I could do that," she says. She could also curl her hair, go for a run, or, yeah, cover any breaking tech news. You can't do that with a dainty purse. Instead, Tsotsis carries a large, heavy-duty Incase backpack, the kind more typically seen on male athletes. "Blogging is a sport," she says — and she's only kind of joking.

— Kelly Dunleavy O'Mara

—Kelly Dunleavy O'Mara



- 1 Prada purse. During the day, she carries just the purse.
 - 2 Hair curler and hair straightener. Tsotsis spends a lot of time showering, since she's always traveling to events and to visit her boyfriend in Palo Alto.
 - 3 Gym clothes and shoes (in their own bag). Ideally, Tsotsis jogs before coming to work, but, she admits, "I end up running at work."
 - 4 Two sets of Apple earbuds
 - 5 Bose headphones
 - 6 iPhone 5. Can you even cover tech in San Francisco and not own an iPhone?
 - 7 Notebook
 - 8 Index cards. Although Tsotsis uses the app Evernote for most notes, she always carries a notebook and index cards to jot down ideas, quotes, etc.
 - 9 Birthday card for her dad
 - 10 iPad 3. Her iPad syncs with her iPhone—or it's supposed to.
 - 11 Sunscreen. "I'm obsessed with sunscreen," says Tsotsis, even in the notoriously unsunny San Francisco.
 - 12 Retainer
 - 13 Keys. To open stuff.
 - 14 Sprint MiFi mobile hotspot. Having reliable Internet access during events and conferences can be a tangible business advantage for a tech website—and it can be brutal fighting for that access.
 - 15 MacBook. Her backup since she lost her MacBook Air.
 - 16 Chargers, lots of chargers
 - 17 Makeup bag
 - 18 Car-insurance information (upside down so you can't read it)
 - 19 Entry cards for TechCrunch and AOL office (though she rarely goes)
 - 20 Sunglasses inside case
 - 21 Ear-wax-removal syringe. Fun fact: Ear wax builds up if you're on the phone a lot.
 - 22 *The Ascent of Money*, by Niall Ferguson. Tsotsis always carries a book, and just finished Andy Kessler's *How We Got Here*. She decided to read more books about the history of things she covers, like money, which, she says, "confounds a lot of people."
 - 23 *Forbes Magazine*. Stolen from the lobby area of the TechCrunch office.
 - 24 Essays on corporate culture. Tsotsis is working on an internal manual about the culture of TechCrunch, how the editorial process works and what is a TechCrunch post.
 - 25 Alexander Wang wallet



Innovation Watch Drill down in the Amazon

In 2008, Gustavo Faleiros, a reporter at the Brazilian news outlet O Echo, sought a way to synthesize the massive amounts of data on the Amazon rainforest in an interactive, visual format. With an area spanning nine countries and 5.5 million square kilometers, the Amazon is the source of some of the most comprehensive data sets in the world. Plotting it on Google maps wouldn't

suffice. "How," says Faleiros, "do you tell the story of this huge region to scale?"

On a fellowship from the International Center for Journalists, he worked with a team of Web designers to create InfoAmazonia (above), a site that merges the Amazon data into a single visual, allowing

users to toggle between "layers of information"—wealth, deforestation, pollution, etc.

With more funding from ICFJ, he launched EcoLabs in May, an incubator for environmentally focused data journalism. Next up: helping news outlets use what he's learned to cover environmental stories.

ECOLABS

Up Next If it ain't broken...

Breaking News. Those two little words can sound a warning cry when uttered by a news anchor. But has the call to attention grown dull from overuse? In July, WDRB, a news station in Louisville, KY, announced that it was ditching the term except in cases where the news warrants it. (Like, when a story is actually *breaking*.) In honor of this noble venture, may we present our highly selective history of the industry's obsession with "breaking" the news.

After the San Francisco earthquake, the Associated Press introduces the "FLASH" as a means of alerting editors to "news of transcendent importance" in as brief a way as possible.

The *New York Times* backs into the breaking-news game with, "Crown Prince at Doorn: Consults with Father on Breaking News of Joachim's Death to Mother," about Prussian Prince Frederick William dealing with his father's grief over his youngest child's suicide.



AP reporter Edward Kennedy defies an Allied Command embargo and breaks news of the Nazi surrender and the end of war in Europe. The AP publicly rebuked and fired Kennedy; he received a posthumous apology last year.

1906

July 23, 1920

May 7, 1945

Darts & Laurels

Racist jokes and fake quotes



DART to KTVU, the Fox affiliate in Oakland, CA, for its infamous broadcast of bogus, racist names for the pilots involved in July's Asiana Airlines plane crash. According to the station's apology, KTVU made a phone call to the National Transportation Safety Board to confirm names, including "Sum Ting Wong" and

"Bang Ding Ow," but somehow never sounded them out—except on the air, of course.

DART to the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, *The Independent*, *The Week*, *Business Insider*, and others for publishing a fake quote about vaccines and autism attributed to Jenny McCarthy. The View host definitely has some wacky ideas about vaccines, but she did not say we should think of the disorder as "a fart" and vaccines as "the finger you pull to make it happen." The quote originated as a joke photo caption on satirical site, *The Superficial*.



LAUREL to Reporting on Health, a website for journalists and civilians that collaborated with eight California news outlets to report the undercovered story of "valley fever," an airborne fungal disease affecting thousands of people across the Southwest. Their reporting drew the attention of *The New York Times*, which

subsequently published a long feature on the plight of the afflicted. (Alas, the *Times* forgot to credit its source.)

ASAF HANUKA

The Lower Case

Police beat reporter found dead in southern Mexico

Associated Press, 7/23/13

Intuitive reels after FDA report, robot recalls

San Francisco Chronicle, 7/20/13

Cops: Miami Man Fatally Shot Over Cell Phone

Gainesville Sun, 7/3/13

Colon works another gem

Minneapolis Star-Tribune, 7/22/13

CJR offers a one-year subscription or gift subscription for an item published in *The Lower Case*. Please send original clippings to CJR, 729 Seventh Avenue, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10019, or links for Web items to cjr@columbia.edu. Please include address, phone, and email.



BBC airs *Broken News*, a satirical take on the nightly news, featuring reporters who endlessly stall for time while they try to manufacture breaking stories.

BreakingNews.com, which aggregates breaking news broken elsewhere, launches. Its Twitter account, @BreakingNews, has 6 million followers.



For the first time, the Pulitzer committee withholds a prize in the "Breaking News" category, eliminating finalist stories on Haiti and the death of two Chicago firefighters.



Anderson Cooper opens his 8pm broadcast with a "breaking" travel warning from the National Weather Service—news that had already been reported by Fox 2 in St. Louis (via CNN) at 9:35am. BuzzFeed dubs Cooper king of "breaking news" misuse.

Media consulting firm SmithGeiger leaks a list of suggested phrases, sent to local TV affiliates to add urgency to newscasts. Samples include: "We do have some breaking news right away"; "You saw it here first just minutes ago"; and "You'll hear in just seconds."

CUMBERBATCH: BBC; COOPER: CNN

2005

2007

2011

February 25, 2013

July 2013

Cold comfort

How to dress for Arctic success

BACK IN THE DAY, ARCTIC EXPLORERS HAD IT EASY. IN ORDER TO DRESS FOR expeditions, they simply approached Inuit hunters and ordered the hides of whatever animals could be killed. Frederick Cook, who claimed to be the first white man to reach the North Pole, packed hare stockings, blue-fox coats, bearfur pants, and bird-skin shirts. His rival, Robert Peary, favored seal.

To my surprise, it was far harder to outfit a reporting trip to the Arctic Circle last winter, despite modern advances such as Gor-Tex. I am the size of a fifth grader, and for obvious reasons they don't typically make garments designed for minus-55 degrees to fit children. Finding a parka that didn't extend to my ankles was proving a challenge. Lest my concerns about wardrobe seem petty, please note that the Arctic is the planet's most forbidding environment, and even the world's great armies struggle to keep their troops warm there. The simplest things, like what to eat and wear, become life-and-death matters. I was planning to observe NATO exercises, and the military manuals warned of the dangers of packing the wrong gear: Fingers could turn black and fall off; hypothermia could set in; the glare from the sun could burn corneas; you could freeze to death.

Such fashion concerns are likely to be shared by more colleagues in years to come. Climate change is defrosting the high north, and thus opening up reporting opportunities in a territory once off limits for all but science writers and madmen. What follows is a cautionary tale in case you, too, need to dress for success on ice.

Since I didn't know any Eskimo furriers, my first stop was Paragon Sports, where correspondents kit out for extreme missions. For a past assignment to the Indonesian swamps, I had purchased some nifty trousers there that were imbedded with mosquito repellent. Logic held that Paragon would stock for the climatic extreme. But when I arrived at the outlet on 18th Street in Manhattan, the salespeople reported that a recent blizzard had cleared out the winter inventory. They were now hanging up beachwear.

So it was onto Patagonia, a favorite of mountain climbers. The store was holding its annual Avalanche Sale, which sounded promising for a snowy trip. The "avalanche" turned out to be a hollering mob that fought over half-price fleece. A helpful saleswoman went on a recon mission and returned with terrible news: The lone anorak left in a small came only in lilac. Lilac. We agreed there was no way I could wear a sissy color among soldiers, and she got on the phone for half an hour to locate a women's Das Parka in Nebraska. Aside from being black, the jacket was made of high-loft 120-g PrimaLoft® Synergy insulation throughout, additional PrimaLoft® ONE insulation in core areas, and a lightweight, PU-coated

nylon ripstop shell. In other words, it was waterproof and windproof.

Patagonia couldn't help with footwear, however. Ordinary hiking boots would not insulate from subzero temperatures; for that I had to venture down the road to Eastern Mountain Sports.

At EMS, the Holy Grail awaited: a pair of Sorel Caribou in size 6. The salesman noted that the boots were rated for minus-40 degrees Celsius, adding: "They feature waterproof construction, seam-sealing, removable ThermoPlus™ felt inner boots for warmth, wool/acrylic-blend snow cuffs, felt frost plugs, and vulcanized rubber shells." They also felt as though someone had poured cement over my feet. As I clumped about like a robot, something in my back snapped.

"They fit perfectly!" the salesman chimed.

He threw in waterproof gloves so thick they could hold their own in the boxing ring, and a balaclava like those worn by Chechen fighters. I was ready to go.

Finding the right clothes was more time-consuming than the three flights and a boat ride it took to reach my destination above the Arctic Circle. Once in the frosty fjords of Norway, I assumed all thoughts about apparel were behind me and I could focus on watching troops shoot in the snow. However, upon arrival at the barracks



Bundle up A Norwegian Army officer at the Allied Arctic Training Center in Bardufoss, Norway, demonstrates the layers of clothing soldiers wear while conducting operations in the Arctic Circle.

in Aasegarden, where NATO trains its toughest men for extreme cold, I was steered to a conference room for what was billed as the most important briefing of all: The Clothing Lecture.

"Everyone must take this lesson," explained Lieutenant Colonel Lars Sundnes, as he switched on the PowerPoint. "For a 100-percent chance of survival, 20 percent is the proper clothing and 80 percent is knowing how to use it."

The presentation included an assortment of brass from different military powers who held forth on the proper garments to fight the cold. One slide ominously showed men gasping as they tried to claw out of a glacial lake. Animal fur did not provide enough protection. Dogs that helped rescue people from avalanches were relegated to kennels when the mercury dipped below minus 4 Celsius. "There has never been a piece of research that shows you can acclimatize to extreme cold," cautioned Major Simon Guest, a medic with the British Royal Marines. "Your body can acclimate to high altitude by producing more red blood cells. But you can't get used to extreme cold."

Got it. Then it was on to an exhibit room, where a young recruit who resembled a Ken doll stood at attention in his skivvies. A colonel barked orders to put on a succession of garments designed by scientists to maximize heat preservation and minimize sweat.

"Mesh!" On went a fishnet vest.

"Long shirt and pants!" The colonel fingered the material. "Seventy percent wool and 30 percent polyester. You have to get the right mix."

"Parka! Gor-Tex! Shell!" Three layers of pants and jacket followed. The colonel stuck his fingers inside Ken's waistband. "Note: Trousers should be a size too large to allow for air flow."

Then it was "Headgear!" (a cap liner and balaclava). "Hands!" (mittens and a Gor-Tex shell). "Feet!" (the boots resembled my Sorels, and over them went an insulated sack).

Once Ken was layered up to resemble the Michelin Man, the colonel moved on to inspect my gear. He pronounced the \$800 worth of purchases "adequate," and I was allowed to venture outside.

There awaited a majestic wilderness

of fjords and peaks. The frozen landscape was pristine, except for men doing sniper practice. I quickly realized that black clothes were as bad as purple. Everyone wears white to blend in with the snow. Black makes you an easy target. I was a sitting, or standing, duck.

While the soldiers skied with 100 pounds of gear on their backs, I simply watched. The human body creates heat as it moves, and after a few hours of immobility, my lungs burned with each breath; icicles formed inside my nose; my toes were numb and the snow glare hurt my eyes. Worse, I couldn't take notes. The gloves were so thick that I had to remove them to grip the ballpoint pen, which in any event didn't write because the ink had frozen. The tape recorder wasn't functioning either; the cold had drained the batteries. I managed to revive the equipment with a hand-warmer in my pants pocket, but the major showing me around grew nervous every time I took off the gloves to write. He checked for white spots on my skin, which was a sign of afflicted flesh.

Suddenly, he began to jump up and down like a frenzied kangaroo.

"Frostbite," he said through gritted teeth. "Had it a dozen times in the toes. Hurts like anything."

I began hopping, too.

Our next activity was avalanche mapping. My enthusiasm for arctic reporting was waning; all I could think of was food. The soldiers are fed 6,000 calories a day to make up for all they lose in the cold. I was probably burning off as much just by shivering. I fondly recalled breakfast, which consisted of a mound of salmon, herring, lamb, potatoes, hamburgers, liver, eggs, and sausages. Why, oh why, didn't I go back for seconds?

I was shaken from my cravings by the sight of the avalanche expert, Jacob Helgersen, scampering up the hill like Jesus walking on water. I, in contrast, sank knee-deep into the snow, pulled down by the Sorel blocks. A half hour later, I caught up with Helgersen. He was standing in a freshly dug hole five feet deep, and whacking at the side of it with a shovel. The snow crumbled at the third blow. "This is bad," he muttered, picking up his tools. Helgersen rushed off, calling over his shoulder, "If there's an avalanche, make an air pocket with one arm. Push the other above the surface. Hopefully, a rescuer can spot you."

I willed the Sorels to move faster.

The trip wrapped up with a camping excursion by the side of a frozen lake. Norwegian troops travel in comfort, and our tent came equipped with reindeer skins and a stove. The soldiers set up a florescent green stick outside to mark where to pee, so that we wouldn't get lost in the frigid dark. Overhead, the Northern Lights put on a spectacular show.

One of the guys warmed cocoa on the stove. It smelled divine, and the major reminded everyone to stay hydrated because of all the sweating in heavy clothes. But then I thought about standing by the pee stick in the permafrost. Temperatures had dropped and the wind was picking up. I politely declined the drink, and contemplated the long night ahead. **CJR**

JUDITH MATLOFF teaches conflict reporting at Columbia's Journalism School. She is the author of two nonfiction books, *Home Girl*, and *Fragments of a Forgotten War*.

UNITED STATES PROJECT SASHA CHAVKIN

Déjà news

The FCC ignores local TV news' quiet consolidation strategy

A STRANGE THING HAPPENS WHEN YOU TURN ON THE NEWS IN HAWAII. TUNE into the 10pm local newscast on KGMB, the Aloha State's CBS affiliate, then switch to its supposed NBC competitor, KHNL. Then go back and forth again. You will see the same stories, the same footage, the same broadcasts from beginning to end. Every weekday, for three hours, the two stations simulcast the news. A third station, KFVE, is also not much of a rival, airing 11 hours of news each week that is produced by the same Honolulu newsroom as KHNL and KGMB. Three of the five stations that deliver daily TV news in Hawaii have been joined into a single news operation.

The three-way partnership represents one of the more striking examples of a rapidly growing phenomenon in local TV news: joint-services agreements. These deals allow different stations in the same market to pool resources. Nationwide, at least 126 joint-services agreements are in effect, covering 99 of the 210 television markets in the country, according to a University of Delaware study. The number has climbed rapidly; a similar study in 2011, just two years earlier, found only 83 markets affected.

What is the problem? In some cases, there is none. The deals vary widely from agreement to agreement, and often include only marketing or sales teams, which seems harmless enough. But many include sharing news operations. A subcategory of joint-services agreements—currently 55 of the known 126—are called shared-services agreements, and they always involve the sharing of news-gathering resources. The resources shared can vary from news scripts and story packages, to reporters and the merger of entire newsrooms—so that communities end up with fewer local voices, less information overall, and only the illusion of choice. News outlets, meanwhile, can end up with more power than the spirit of Federal Communications Commission rules on media consolidation would seem to warrant.

For decades, the tendency in the television industry has been toward consolidation—fewer and fewer owners with more and more power over what we get as news. Congress and the FCC have long tried to temper this trend by regulating ownership and market limits. In calculating the limits, though, the FCC has chosen not to include most joint-services agreements: Only marketing and sales agreements covering more than 15 percent of a station's advertising time are attributed toward the limits, while the crucial news-oriented deals, shared-services agreements, are exempted entirely. Critics see this as a big loophole:

While the FCC limits consolidation, it turns a blind eye to a trend that has very similar effects.

In Hawaii, back in 2009, an advocacy group calling itself Media Council Hawaii argued to the FCC that the consolidation of operations between the three Honolulu news operations, in effect, violated rules limiting a single company's holdings in a single market. FCC rules prohibit one company from owning more than one station in the same market, with a small number of exceptions, such as if the two stations' service areas do not overlap (none of these exceptions applied in Hawaii). The FCC examined the case, and staff members report having serious misgivings about the deal.

But ultimately, the commission

decided that it could not reject a shared-services agreement for violating ownership limits because no broadcast license had changed hands. Its 2011 ruling on the matter stated that "further action on our part is warranted with respect to this and analogous cases" to determine if such deals are "consistent with the public interest." But it has not followed up with any such action.

"One of the questions that I've always had is, where is the FCC in all of this?" says Bob Papper, the chair of the journalism department at Hofstra University and an expert on local television news. Papper said he supports joint-services agreements in some cases, but that others, such as the Hawaii deal, appear to plainly violate the intent of ownership limits. "If the regulator isn't

regulating, then I'm not sure where we are," he said.

Dumbing down the dialogue?

The growth of joint-services agreements is occurring at a time of very rapid overall consolidation in the local broadcast industry. The last few months alone have seen the Tribune Company purchase most of Local TV's stations, Gannett Company purchase Belo, Media General merge with New Young Broadcasting, and the behemoth Sinclair Broadcast Group purchase Fisher Communications. Industry executives have predicted that within five years or less, local broadcasting will be dominated by a three or four "super groups," while smaller companies are swallowed up or go out of business.



Seeing double Or even triple. TV news outlets in 99 of the nation's 210 television markets have some type of joint-services agreement under which they share resources, from reporters to video to entire programming lineups.

According to television news experts, such mergers and acquisitions can lead to more joint-services agreements via a self-perpetuating cycle: Acquiring new stations leads companies to take on debt. Debt, in turn, provides powerful incen-

Pai, a current FCC commissioner, took a strong stance against the argument that stations should count these agreements toward media ownership limits in individual markets—a decision that would likely put an end to most joint-services

agreements for reasons of economic necessity. And some of the agreements have indeed resulted in substantial job losses, according to news reports cited in studies by the University of Delaware: 68 jobs lost at the Hawaii stations; 27 jobs lost in an agreement in Idaho Falls, ID; 15 jobs lost in Providence, RI, for example.

Since the FCC doesn't track them, most of what we know about joint-services agreements comes from those University of Delaware studies—information painstakingly gathered from news reports and surveys of stations by a professor, Danilo Yanich. After the Hawaii deal went into effect, Yanich and his intrepid students compared the content of the news aired by the three stations involved before and after the agreement. He found that the quantity of unique story topics on each station dropped sharply, while the amount of shared subject matter—meaning coverage of the same story, such as a crime at a particular address—more than doubled. During a weeklong period before the deal, the three stations ran 53 stories on topics addressed exclusively on one station and 76 stories on topics that were addressed by more than one station. During a similar period after the agreement, the stations ran only 19 stories on a topic covered exclusively by one station, and 157 on topics covered by multiple stations. (It is worth noting, however, that the total number of stories on the stations increased after the deal.)

Another study by Yanich of eight joint-services agreements in markets across the country found similar results. Among the stories with shared content on the partnering stations, most had the same scripts, the same video, or both.

A right to know

Just as the FCC does not track joint-services agreements, it has declined to conduct research into them. At one point, when it was commissioning research for its (still unfinished) 2010 quadrennial review of media ownership rules, the commission ordered studies be conducted on 11 ownership-related topics to inform its new rules, and commissioner Copps pressed for the research to consider joint-services agreements.

Is the sharing of resources among allegedly competing local TV news stations bad for democracy, or are cable and satellite operators just trying to thwart the broadcast industry?

tive to cut costs in the newsroom. And joint-services agreements are tailor-made for that.

Media policy advocates fear that this cycle is reducing the number of voices among local broadcasters, which remain Americans' leading source of local news. "Localism has suffered and the quality of our news and information has suffered," says former FCC Commissioner Michael Copps about industry consolidation and the spread of joint-services agreements. "I don't think we have the luxury of having another two or three years of dumbing down our civic dialogue, and expecting that the American people will be informed."

On the other side of this debate are broadcasters, who argue—just as adamantly—that joint-services agreements have the opposite effect: improving both the quality and accessibility of local news. They note that the deals sometimes allow small stations without the capacity to produce their own local news to air news programming. During the recent recession, say broadcast industry groups, the agreements were sometimes lifelines for struggling stations. "We don't see anything inherently bad about two stations sharing, for example, a helicopter," says Dennis Wharton, a spokesman for the industry group National Association of Broadcasters (NAB). "Ultimately, if there's a lessening of the standards viewers expect, they'll be the final arbiters."

In an address last February at the FCC Media Institute Luncheon, Ajit

agreements. "If the FCC effectively prohibits these agreements, fewer stations in small-town America will offer news programming, and they will invest less in newsgathering," Pai said. "And the economics suggest that there likely will be fewer television stations, period."

The NAB, meanwhile, contends that much of the opposition to joint-services agreements is driven by forces far less altruistic than media reformers concerned about diversity of ownership. Wharton, the group's spokesman, says that paid TV companies such as cable and satellite TV providers have a major stake in the fight, and are seeking to weaken the viability of the broadcast industry. Paid TV giants, such as Time Warner, DISH Network, and DirecTV, "want to get rid of competition that is free," he says.

Broadcasters also argue that sharing resources saves jobs, although that case is harder to make. Jobs in TV news seem more tied to the overall economy than anything else. The number of jobs in local television news plummeted during the recession, but that number has sharply recovered recently. By 2012, according to Hofstra's annual survey, local news set a record for full-time employment, with 27,653 jobs.

The inherent nature of the joint-services agreements, their critics say, is to reduce jobs. And now that the industry is booming again—with strong job growth and a rush of mergers and acquisitions—advocates argue that there is no longer any excuse to tolerate the

But he lost that round. A former FCC staffer, who asked to remain anonymous, said that during the process the NAB lobbied heavily to prevent joint-services agreements from being addressed. "They were very adamant that we not include it as part of the quadrennial review in terms of ownership," the staffer said. (The FCC declined to comment for this story.)

President Obama has nominated Tom Wheeler—a campaign bundler and former lobbyist for cable television companies—to become the commission's next chairman. The FCC is unlikely to take action on ownership rules before Wheeler's confirmation, which is expected to be approved but as of press time is pending before the Senate.

Meanwhile, the agency's passivity on joint-services agreements has begun to attract some attention. In June, Senator Jay Rockefeller, a Democrat from West Virginia, released an open letter to the Government Accountability Office, urging it to examine whether the agreements violate ownership limits. The letter also calls on the GAO to examine whether the FCC could begin requiring public disclosure of the deals.

To some, the lack of information about joint-services agreements is the worst part. "I think people should be concerned about the lack of information," said Steve Waldman, a former FCC adviser. "The public has a right to know much more about these arrangements."

Waldman supports the idea of joint-services agreements in some situations. But, he said, the lack of information about them makes it impossible to determine which agreements reflect sensible attempts at efficiency, and which are driven by cost cutting and outsourcing. "The promise of shared services agreements is that we'll use shared services to eliminate duplicate investment, and then we'll invest them in investigative reporting and boots on the ground," he said. "And that isn't what happened. It's evolved in some cases into outsourcing the news." **CJR**

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SAY WHAT? GERALD ESKENAZI

The Gray Lady blushes

A former Times sportswriter recalls a primmer era

CHUCK RAMSEY, THE NEW YORK JETS' PUNTER, WAS CRYING. IT WAS 1979 AND the first time I had ever seen a National Football League player in tears.

"What's wrong, Chuck," I asked after the Jets had lost a *Monday Night Football* game in Seattle. "Was it that punt they blocked?"

"How would you feel," the kicker asked, "if the coach said to the entire team, 'I can fart farther than you can punt?'"

How, indeed?

Now, my problem was how to get that remarkable quote into *The New York Times*.

The Times, that paper of record, was also the guardian of politesse. Its stylebook was written in stone, like ancient commandments. Its mission, among many others, was never to offend—even on the sports pages. Beyond the stylebook, though, were the almost tribal edicts, passed down from slot man to slot man.

Thus, on my first horseracing assignment at Aqueduct in the early 1960s, a helpful editor told me, "Remember, you can't say a horse *came from behind* in the stretch." I wondered, is there some editor in an ivory tower on West 43rd Street going out of his way to find double entendres?

Soon after my immaculate debut at Aqueduct, I covered the Preakness, the second jewel in the Triple Crown of racing. The huge infield was packed with thousands of fans, so many that management needed to provide portable toilets for them, which I dutifully described.

No way. All references to portable toilets had to be, um, flushed.

Dirt, or words that sounded like dirt, seemed to be a no-no at *The Times* (we capitalized the "t" in "The"). When I asked Muhammad Ali whether he enjoyed southern cooking, he replied, rhetorically, "Does a pig like slop?" "Slop" is a southern locution for food fed to farm animals. But I guess it had some other nasty connotations for that editor in the ivory tower. The quote was killed.

Meanwhile, I was wondering why our magnificent columnist, Dave Anderson, infused his stories with the expression "in the confusion." He often started them with those three words, or they cropped up in the middle of his pieces. So what was the story?

I found out that one of our reporters—a great guy who was hard of hearing—was at a party. It was noisy, and he was speaking loudly because of his disability, as well as because of the decibel level around him. He was telling a story about one of his road trips. Suddenly, as happens at these shindigs, the room grew quiet.

quiet. But he didn't realize it and kept talking in a loud voice, getting to the punchline, which he shouted: "And in the confusion, I fucked the widow!" Everyone heard him.

Thus, Dave, such a pleasant guy, never hesitated sneaking in those three little words. Still. (I admit, I do, too.)

But there wasn't much you could sneak in at *The Times*. Even medical conditions were subject to scrutiny, if not a proctologic examination. When Ali was training for his first title defense against Sonny Liston, he suffered a painful hernia. He was rushed to the hospital and underwent surgery. Our Bob Lipsyte, perhaps the writer I most admired on the paper, already had filed his story for the day and had left, and could not be reached in that pre-cell-phone year of 1964. I happened to be on rewrite that night, and the editors asked me to insert the medical facts.

I worked the phone in my best Page One fashion and got a rather complete medical history and explanation of what happened and why Ali (who was then called Cassius Clay) had to postpone the bout.

Except after I wrote the story, proud that I had made the deadline, editors told me I couldn't use the word "testicle." Sort of like writing about an attack of appendicitis without using the word "appendix." After some protesting, I complied, and the Old Gray Lady heaved a sigh of relief.

Brigitte Nielsen, ex-wife of Sylvester Stallone and inamorata of the Jets' defensive star, Mark Gastineau, was a 6-foot Swedish blonde who had made a few movies in Europe (what, you never heard of *Red Sonja*?). I had gotten friendly with her at team practices as she watched her "Markie" work out.

One night, before the three of us went out to dinner, she showed me around their rented home on Long Island. In their bedroom was a bed so high (Mark was about 6'5") that you needed a small ladder to climb onto it. She launched herself onto the bed, and began to roll around. "This," she said breathlessly, "is where Mark and I have all our fun."

You don't really think that quote made the paper, do you?

Of course, those of us who work

with words are delighted when we can invigorate the language with a new phrase, or find an athlete who has a new way of saying something old and tired.

I am grateful still to the old Mets manager, Wes Westrum, who remarked after a close game, "Boy, that certainly

In The New York Times, St. John's never 'whips' St. Cecilia's.

was a cliff-dweller!" I believe we permitted that quote to remain, as we did that from the Buffalo Bills football coach who remarked, "We knocked the sails out of his wind."

And Joe Gardi, a Jets assistant coach, is in my pantheon of wordsmiths, because he told me, when discussing the team's problems, "We've got to nip it in the butt." Perhaps so, but not in *The Times*.

Which brings me back to the tearful punter, Chuck Ramsey.

After he told me that head coach Walt Michaels had used the word "fart," I called the paper. Remember, I was in Seattle, and it was close to midnight in New York. I told them what I had. They told me they'd call me back, that it needed a command decision. The response was fairly quick—"You can't use the word, but you can paraphrase it." So I dutifully quoted Ramsey as saying that Michaels had yelled, "I can spit farther than you can punt."

However, one of the tabloids in the city actually used the real quote. And then the Long Island paper *Newsday*, which had a media columnist then, subsequently wrote a big story about how every paper in the city had used that f-word except *The Times*, which—for shame—altered the quote.

That embarrassed the powers at my paper, and an edict came down from on high: Never again is a quote to be altered for any reason. You can use brackets to show that a word has been changed, but not actually change a quote directly. I

mentioned that edict to Ramsey later that week.

Some years later, I was at a Jets exhibition game in Nashville. Ramsey had retired, but I happened to spot him at the players' entrance, where he was visiting old friends.

"Hey, Jerry," he called. "Over here. I want you to meet someone." He introduced me to a friend.

"This is the guy," he said to his friend, as he held my hand, "who made me famous in *The New York Times*. They have a rule about me there!"

Good for Chuck, I thought. Glad he could laugh about that odious moment. Still, some part of me wishes I could have made history at the paper by getting the f-word past our editors.

Perhaps I might have if, once again, an editor hadn't cautioned me. I was leaving the office to cover a New York Rangers hockey game when my kindly editor told me: "Don't use the word 'puck.'" And why not? Because the linotype operators were engaged in union negotiations, and to flex their muscles, some operators might have a puckish sense of humor and give the rubber disk a new first letter.

So I wrote a thousand words about a hockey game without using the word "puck." It was a *hard rubber disk*, a *black sphere*, but never a "puck."

Do I have any other regrets for words not written? Well, maybe it would have been fun to have slipped one or two in when I was a young *Times* reporter on the high-school sports beat. I wrote about the public schools in New York City, of course, but also wrote about the Catholic Schools, though was sternly warned before my first column: In *The New York Times*, St. John's never "whips" St. Cecilia's. And woe to the writer who dares to say that St. Cecilia's "downs" St. John's.

I thought about that simpler time recently when I read a longform piece in the paper about a transgender martial-arts fighter. Wonder whether you could say she "topped" her opponent? Or even, in the confusion of a martial-arts brawl, had her down for the count? **CJR**

GERALD ESKENAZI produced 8,000 bylines in more than 40 years with *The New York Times*, in addition to writing 16 books. He now lectures on sports and the news media.

Serious Fun

**"Boston Bomber's" Former Friends
Suspect Him In Triple Murder**

**Exclusive: Documents Illuminate
Ecuador's Spying Practices**

**Liberal Super PAC Had Secret
Bain Ties**

**The Sequester Isn't A Joke
For Jeff Maryak**

**For Thousands of Veterans,
The New G.I. Bill Isn't Working**

**Exclusive: Marco Rubio's
Mormon Roots**

**Why Did Jodan Romero Kill Himself
On Live Television?**

**How Smash Became TV's Biggest
Train Wreck**

**At Harvard, Obama Dived Into
Diversity Fight**

Why Amish Teens Love Facebook

**21 Pictures That Will Restore
Your Faith In Humanity**

**33 Animals Who Are Extremely
Disappointed In You**

**Why No One Should Mess
With The Ocean**

The 40 Greatest Dog GIFs Of All Time

**32 Things I Learned At
The World's Biggest Pizza Show**

**31 Insanely Easy And Clever
DIY Projects**

**12 Extremely Disappointing Facts
About Popular Music**

**13 Steps To Get You Through
A Rough Day**

**50 People You Wish You Knew
In Real Life**

**Life In Your Early Twenties
Vs. Your Late Twenties**

**Thank you to our
60M+ readers who
know life can be
serious and fun.**

BuzzFeed



'Man camps' Oil workers live in trailer parks, like this one near Watford City, ND.

ON THE JOB

Boomdocks

BY JOE HERNANDEZ

INDEPENDENT RADIO PRODUCER TODD MELBY LIVES MORE THAN 600 miles from his wife and kids in a basement in western North Dakota. It's such a desolate area, he says, that "some East Coast intellectuals once suggested turning it back to the buffalo." Yet Melby has managed to document some of the most meaningful stories of his career here, thanks to a recent oil boom that's drawn thousands of job seekers from across the country.

North Dakota's Bakken Shale became a magnet for oil production after engineers first used horizontal drilling techniques there in 2007. Almost overnight, access to huge untapped oil reserves fueled tens of thousands of new jobs on the patch. So-called man camps—rows of white trailers, most without water or electricity—rose up around the fields to house new workers. The number of people employed in North Dakota's oil industry has more than tripled since 2007. The population in the state's oil-producing western region is expected to jump by 50 percent in the next 20 years.

Melby is telling the stories of these workers, and the locals adapting to the new industry, for a public-radio project called "Black Gold Boom: How Oil Changed North Dakota." "This is about individual narratives," he says, "what people hate or love about the boom." The heart of the project is the audio portraits of people, some of whom Melby discovered while driving his red Ford Escape along Highway 85.

That's where he met food-truck owner Adell Hackworth, parked on 85's long stretch of road between Williston and Watford City, two of the main hubs of North Dakota oil production. She says all the men who stop at her truck tell her the same story about leaving their previous lives behind to start over in oil country. Highway 85, Hackworth says, is "going to be called the 'Highway of Hope.'"

But the promise of a quick fortune on the oil patch is far from reality for many workers. Domanick David moved from Minnesota to the Bakken with two friends. As the weeks dragged on, none had jobs, and David's bank balance was in the double digits. "Nobody wanted to hire anybody with no experience," he says.

For Melby, one of the best things about the project is getting stories of working people on national radio. "It's a huge treat hearing the voice of Bobcat John on *Marketplace*," he says, referring to a burly North Dakota knife salesman who once owned a declawed bobcat as a pet. "Black Gold Boom" stories also have aired on Prairie Public, NPR's *All Things Considered*, and WUNC's *The Story*. With his funding from The Association of Independents in Radio running out, Melby recently secured a grant from the Fund for Investigative Journalism to continue the project. He's also finishing proposals for a television documentary based on the stories. "The rest of America is hearing these voices for the first time," Melby says proudly. "It's a blast." **CJR**

JOE HERNANDEZ is a CJR intern.

TODD MELBY

A JOURNALIST IS
SOMEONE WHO
IS WILLING TO
DISAPPOINT HIMSELF
WITH THE TRUTH.

a journalist
is
first and
foremost a
questioner.

To
inform and
enlighten;
to expand the
dialogue;
to probe and
provoke;

CRONKITE'S "THAT'S THE WAY IT IS" NO LONGER APPLIES.

the quality
control for
information

About addressing what's true
and what's false.

for telling the truth
of ourselves to ourselves.

to
stimulate
and engage;
to show the way
present
another.

JOURNALISM

for those who don't understand
the question or the answer...

The world is a blur.

Journalism is a
SUPERCONDUCTOR.

An activity,
not a
profession.

A tool,
a

THE IMMUNE SYSTEM OF DEMOCRACY. platform,
NOT FUCKING ROCKET SCIENCE. and
a forum

TELLING PEOPLE THINGS

THEY DON'T KNOW ABOUT THE WORLD

the best thing a journalist
can hear is "wait, what?"

for truth

(Beyond being a beautiful job, journalism is a state of mind.)

IN HIS 1999 BOOK, WHAT ARE JOURNALISTS FOR?,

which told the story of the civic-journalism movement, Jay Rosen suggested that the question in the title is one our society must ask itself periodically, as times change and the demands on and of journalism change with them. Now is one of those moments. Everything about our profession is up for debate. Congress is arguing about the definition of “journalist”; startups are experimenting with new business models and ways to deliver news to a mobile audience; people all over the world who don’t call themselves journalists are using social media and smartphones to record, broadcast, and comment on “news.”

In the following pages, CJR offers a range of perspectives on the question, What is journalism for?—from Rosen himself; from Ukrainian journalists who became activists in their fight against censorship; from the executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, who has stopped trying to determine *who* is a journalist and instead defends free speech for everyone; from a bunch of citizens who took over a weekly on an island in Lake Michigan and are trying to figure out what to do with it; and from many others.

The relationship between the press and the public has shifted in the new century. The one-way flow of information has become a free-for-all, and the professionals have lost some authority. Civic journalism was about making the public a partner with professional journalism in an effort to identify and address problems that affect us all. It was resisted by much of the journalistic establishment, who considered it an abdication of their duty to “tell the people what they need to know,” and it petered out soon after Rosen’s book appeared.

It’s too bad. Had journalism made common cause with the public back then, its position in 2013 might be somewhat less embattled.

The 'awayness' problem

I was there, you weren't; let me tell you about it

BY JAY ROSEN

The elemental question that CJR has asked me to address, "What is journalism for?" is 100 times better than the more commonly seen, "Who's a journalist?" which is nothing but an invitation to class war. So let us dig in.

The 'awayness' of things

Try to imagine a world where journalism as an activity, and journalists as an occupational group, do not exist, but news does. For news is older and more basic to civilization than journalism. People have always exchanged news ("What news on the Rialto?" says Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*), but they have not always needed specialists in gathering and telling the news—journalists—to help them do it. Once we identify the conditions that make the work necessary, we can begin to answer the question of what journalism "is."

The key to it is the problem of scale. I've had to invent a word to better describe this problem: "awayness." Not the most elegant term, but it will do. Picture a small New England fishing village with 200 inhabitants. There is news in that village: births, deaths, marriages, feuds, a new church, a ship recently arrived from Europe. But the scale on which people move about is tiny enough that such news can circulate on its own. Eyes and ears, word of mouth, and the town gossip: these are sufficient to inform the inhabitants of what's going on. People learn the news by walking around.

Enlarge the scale to 10,000 and that system no longer works. Things happening in one section of town are invisible to people living and working in another. There is a good chance they won't hear of them just by walking around. But still, this is *their* town. To the degree that they identify with it, they will want to know "what's going on." The only way they can know is if someone makes it his or her business to find out and tell them. We think of journalism as responding to a public need to know, but to understand this need we have to start further back in the process: What causes a knowledge of the present to go missing in the first place?

My answer: the rising "awayness" of things. Journalism enters the picture when human settlement, daily economy, and political organization grow beyond the scale of the self-informing populace.

Search for the present

In 1990, the great Mexican poet Octavio Paz delivered a lecture upon winning the Nobel Prize for literature. In it, he recalled the shattering effect that a single photograph had upon him as a child growing up in the 1920s. Paz lived in a house in Mixcoac, on the outskirts

of Mexico City, with a library full of picture books and a big garden planted with fig, pine, ash, and pomegranate trees. Together, the library and garden created a happy universe, where faraway lands and heroic battles could be conjured at will. The branches of a fig tree swayed like a pirate's ship, the patio of a neighbor's house became the ridge of a distant mountain range. The child had a vivid sense of near and far. But his grasp of these notions was still connected to a world he could see and touch. As Paz put it, "The beyond was here."

One day, he was shown a photograph of some soldiers returning from World War I that disturbed him greatly. He now knew that somewhere far away, a war had ended. From his picture books he knew something of wars. But he had not known about *this* war, which was undeniably real, and yet strangely unavailable to him.

The photograph, says Paz, refuted the reality of his childhood world. He felt dislodged from the present, expelled from his garden. The awayness of things had been made real to him, attacking his naïve existence. The experience was repeated again and again, as some item of news demonstrated the reality of this other, more public world. In his daily life there was now a horizon that was beyond his garden, which forced upon him the uncomfortable feeling that he did not inhabit the real present, that he did not live in the real world.

Eventually, he said, he accepted the inevitable, rearranging his mental map to include the region from which that first, disruptive photograph had arrived. He began his adult life, which he described as a "search for the present." What he meant by this is that he sought some way to live as a man of his time, to belong to the 20th century. He found it in literature and poetry—he became a writer—but his "search for the present" began because of an early encounter with the news.

What this story illustrates, I think, is the special power that journalism has to enlarge our sense of the present so that it includes the public world. Journalism becomes a powerful force in the culture when it gains a kind of authority over the present, persuading us that what is happening "out there," over the horizon

**THERE ARE NO
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BUT ONLY
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NOTICING.**

—Mary McCarthy, *American author and critic*
(1912–1989)

of our personal experience, is happening to us and must be followed. When it works, journalism refutes an existence that has grown too private.

But for it to have this effect we must do as Paz did—place ourselves in a wider universe and become creatures of our time. Often we feel more like spectators, horrified or fascinated at a distance, absorbed in the moment, but not necessarily engaged in the present. Perhaps that is when “the media” triumphs over journalism.

‘I’m there, you’re not, let me tell you about it’

So what is journalism, really? My answer: A report on what’s happening over the horizon of our personal experience. Journalism permits us to live as creatures of our time and make peace with the awayness of things within some community we identify with. There are intimate connections between it and diary writing, as well as bookkeeping (the day book of accounts). But journalism would never have become an essential practice in modern societies without the enlargement of scale and the fixing of modern identity within that bigger frame.

Who, what, when ...

From high-school teachers to new-media whiz kids, conservative pundits to liberal wonks, African poets to Google executives, CJR asked people to answer the question, What is journalism for?, preferably in 100 words or less. You can add your own response at CJR.org.

Arianna Huffington

Journalism is meant to give people a true sense of their world, so they can participate and have a voice in how their world is structured. Relentless horse-race coverage, obsessive reporting on meaningless polls, prioritizing balance over the truth, and a narrow focus only on what’s not working does not give the public a real sense of what’s going on. Journalism should also shine a light on what is working, so people can act on their innate desire to help their neighbor and make their communities, and their world, a better place.

ARIANNA HUFFINGTON is the chair, president, and editor in chief of Huffington Post Media Group.

Alexander Jutkowitz

In today’s digital age, plenty of people and organizations have the means to share what they know. Journalism happens when someone tells a compelling true story. Period. The practice need not be limited to an elite group of professionals called “journalists,” but those who attempt it must tell great stories and share knowledge. A tongue-in-cheek essay, an infographic that makes a complicated topic instantly accessible, or an in-depth piece of reporting that teaches, inspires, or reveals—all of these things make people smarter and better able to navigate the world. That, in turn, makes societies better.

ALEXANDER JUTKOWITZ is managing partner of Group SJR and a member of CJR’s Board of Overseers.

Monica Almeida

As a young reporter in 1987, one of my first big assignments was to cover the aftermath of the eviction of artisanal miners in southern Ecuador. Along with a two-man camera crew, I drove four hours and linked up with two guides and several mules. Police were patrolling the main road into the mining community, so the mules were the only way up the hill. After three hours of slow climbing, we arrived at a place called La Playa, where at least 200 miners and their families had been violently evicted the day before to clear land that the government had leased to La Tigrera, a mining company.

There were fresh traces of blood on the ground and bullet holes on the main house’s walls. We could hear children crying, while just a few women stood around, waiting. They had no guns; their only defense was to keep their urine to protect themselves against tear gas if the police returned.

Officially, there were only two men killed, about 50 wounded, and several missing. The police claimed the miners received them with dynamite, but no officers were reported dead. Even now, more than 25 years later, what actually happened is not clear. It has been under investigation by a government truth commission, created in 2007 to investigate human-rights violations allegedly committed during the term of President León Febres-Cordero.

CONTINUED ▶

In this sense, the American republic incorporated journalism from the beginning because it assumed a common identity over the 13 original states. There had never been a republic attempted over such an "extent of territory" (that was the phrase then). One of the answers the founders gave to doubters was that the press would freely circulate across the new nation, from center to margin and back, and thereby solve an unprecedented problem in awayness.

The authority of the journalist originates in this kind of claim: "I'm there, you're not, let me tell you about it." Or: "I reviewed those documents, you couldn't—you were too busy trying to pay the mortgage—so let me tell you what they show." Or: "We interviewed the workers who were on that drilling platform when it exploded, you didn't, let us tell you their story." Or: "I have this source in the national security establishment, you don't, let me tell you what he says is being done in your name."

Obviously, then, the part-time blogger who goes to the school-board meeting and writes about it for those who couldn't be there is doing journalism because journalism is also an extended reflection on the word *meanwhile*. You were getting your kids to bed. Meanwhile, there was a school board meeting. You're trading bonds. Meanwhile, new unemployment figures were released. This is just another way of describing the problem of scale and the condition I have called awayness. A lot happens while we're doing other things. Some of it matters to who we are. When we elect to become men and women of our time, we need journalism to make good on that choice. Whether enough of us will continue to choose that option is perhaps the field's greatest unknown. But journalists are not powerless over that decision. The better they are at what they do, the more likely we are to live in search of the present. **CJR**

JAY ROSEN is a journalism professor at New York University. He writes *PressThink*, a blog about journalism and its ordeals, and is the author of *What Are Journalists For?*, about the rise of the civic-journalism movement.

Identity crisis

Why journalists should drop the push for special protection and just defend freedom of expression

BY JOEL SIMON

When young people took to the streets of Istanbul in June to rally to preserve a downtown park, the mainstream Turkish media ignored the protests. One major station aired a documentary about penguins, another broadcast a report on mental illness. Furious, demonstrators attacked a news van and assaulted several reporters. They also developed their own alternative sources of information, using Twitter and other social media to get the word out.

Turkish authorities, meanwhile, claimed the media were biased against them. Police targeted the press that did cover the demonstrations, while officials lashed out at the international news outlets, including CNN and the BBC. The Turkish prime minister denounced Twitter as a "menace," and the mayor of Ankara used his personal Twitter account to attack the BBC correspondent, a Turkish national, whom he called a "traitor."

As the protests raged in Taksim Square, the scene became so bewildering that NBC's chief foreign correspondent, Richard Engel, actually expressed some sympathy for the Turkish police as they sought to distinguish protesters from the professional media. "There were people with big cameras, there were people with small cameras, and there were people with cellphones," Engel told the UN Security Council at a July 17 briefing on threats to journalists around the world. "There were some people with cellphones who wore gas masks who were clearly part of the

conflict and of the clashes that were ongoing."

Engel urged the Security Council to make a distinction between "freedom of expression," to which everyone is entitled, and the realm of special protection that applies only to professional journalists. This special journalistic realm Engel described would exclude, for instance, Syrian state television broadcasting pro-Assad propaganda and media activists using social media to document atrocities committed by the Syrian military. "Just as representatives in the diplomatic community need protection to be objective, if the international community wants professionals who are objective, we need some protection as well," Engel argued.

For professional journalists who take pride in their objectivity and thoroughness, Engel's notion may have appeal. But any effort by governments to grant privilege and protection to one class of journalists while excluding others is, in fact, a form of licensing, which is anathema to journalism. Moreover, the global

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APPEAR THAT
IT HAS.

—Mark Twain, American author and humorist
(1835–1910)

information environment has become so complex that the traditional media—including the international media—is now just one source of news and information, and in some cases not the most objective one.

Take Egypt, for example. While the Egyptian media became more diverse and more open following the fall of Mubarak, they also became more polarized. Many journalists—including prominent professionals like Ibrahim Eissa, an editor and TV commentator—said the boundaries between journalism and activism had broken down. “As a journalist, your job is to seek the truth and defend your freedom, and that makes you an activist in this environment,” Eissa told me during my visit to Cairo in March. When the military moved in to topple the Morsi government, Eissa expressed active support for the troops. The military shut down media outlets that were sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood, claiming they were engaged in “incitement.” Reporters for Al Jazeera, whose coverage in Egypt was widely perceived

That day I shared the rage, indignation, and grief of those women. At 23, I understood that I had to reveal stories of injustice lest those stories disappear into oblivion and indifference. Since then I have written many stories, about everything from violent events to white-collar crime. Each one has been a great responsibility and a big challenge. It is not only about being accurate and pursuing the truth; it also is about using words with a purpose. Sometimes that purpose is to give people better information so they can make better choices, sometimes it is to provoke a change in a specific situation, or to defend fundamental liberties, or to stand up for someone or something. Sometimes it is also a matter of not following the agenda set by the powerful, but of telling the stories of people affected by that agenda.

And during these 25 years, I have been threatened in different ways; nothing too grave compared to places where journalists are jailed or killed for doing their jobs. But now, for the first time, I feel that I won’t be able to fulfill my journalistic pledge. A new media law has gone into effect in Ecuador. Under this law I wouldn’t be able to print the story about the miners. The law censors me. Under its terms, stories of crime and corruption will not be reported. Now I have to learn a new meaning of journalism, one that serves the government but not the citizens. Shall I call that journalism?

MONICA ALMEIDA is an editor at *El Universo*, a daily newspaper in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

Brenda Butler

Journalism is for the people. It is community-centric yet global in perspective. It is to inform and enlighten; to expand the dialogue; to probe and provoke; to stimulate and engage; to show the way or present another way; to open the doors and to uncover wrong; to give the voiceless a megaphone.

BRENDA BUTLER is executive director of Columbia Links, a high-school journalism, news literacy, and leadership program in Chicago for at-risk teens.

Andrew Revkin

On a complicated, fast-forward planet enveloped in information, journalists who thrive will be those who offer news consumers the same sense of trust that a skilled mountain guide provides to climbers after an avalanche. A sure trail cannot be guaranteed, but an honest effort can. Cronkite’s “That’s the way it is” no longer applies. Authority will derive less from an established media brand than through the constant scrutiny of the crowd. Effectiveness and impact may still come sometimes through a competitive scoop, but more often through collaborative networks in which insights flow in many directions.

ANDREW REVKIN is a science and environmental journalist who writes the Dot Earth blog for *The New York Times*’ op-ed page.

Michelle Chavez

Remember the days when we relied on the newsboy to give us the latest happenings in town by tossing a tightly rolled bundle of newsprint on our doorstep? I don’t. The newsboy has long since traded in his bike for a mobile device. People today share news updates through social media, forwarding information from a news source or from a friend. News outlets have gone from being the sole providers of content to asking citizens to contribute information that journalists will process and forward back out. Now that anyone can provide “news,” people assume that everyone can play the role of the journalist. But it’s not that easy. In fact, the bombardment of information reinforces the idea that we need journalists now more than ever.

The Internet has made it possible to access news and information quickly, but it also has made it easy to disseminate inaccurate or misleading information. It is more crucial than ever that we be able to distinguish fact from fiction.

CONTINUED ▶



Are you a journalist? A Turkish police officer fires tear gas during an anti-government rally near Taksim Square in Istanbul in July. With everyone carrying cellphones and various digital gear, police had trouble distinguishing actual journalists from protestors.

to reflect the foreign-policy objectives of the Qatari government that had backed Morsi, were harassed, detained, and expelled from press conferences.

In Brazil, even as journalists covering public protests were arrested and attacked by police, they were also set upon by angry demonstrators who, as in Turkey, burned a news vehicle and harassed reporters. And in Russia, where television is subservient to the Kremlin and print media, with certain notable exceptions, generally respects the government's red lines, Aleksei Navalny used his anti-corruption blog to gain prominence as an opposition figure and candidate for Moscow mayor. In July he was convicted on trumped-up corruption charges and sentenced to five years in prison.

Rather than erect barriers in the form of special laws, journalists should be breaking barriers down, recognizing

that their ability to do their job depends less on defining a separate realm in which they operate and more on finding ways to ensure that freedom of expression is broadly defended and preserved—for journalists and non-journalists alike.

The issue is relevant not only on the front lines in Taksim and Tahrir, but also in the United States, where the issue of special protections for journalists is very much in the public debate.

In May, the Justice Department sent a letter to The Associated Press acknowledging that investigators had seized its phone records as part of a leak investigation. A week later it was revealed that investigators from Justice had obtained phone and email records for Fox News reporter James Rosen, who was named a "co-conspirator" in a separate leak investigation. In response to the widespread outcry, the Justice Department has revised its internal guidelines for

**I BECAME A
JOURNALIST
PARTLY SO THAT
I WOULDN'T
EVER HAVE TO
RELY ON THE
PRESS FOR MY
INFORMATION.**

— Christopher Hitchens, journalist and author
(1949–2011)

That's where the journalist comes in—and where it becomes clear why the term “journalist” should not be used loosely. News outlets are supposed to provide the “final word,” the most accurate, up-to-date information. This implies that consumers should be able to trust the information they get from journalists. Too often, though, these outlets, in an effort to break news and be the first to report something, sacrifice accuracy in the service of speed. Mistakes, they seem to think, can be corrected later if necessary. Who is there to trust for that “final word” if the news industry plays this speed game? If journalists want to maintain—or regain—the respect and trust of the public, they need to deal with this dilemma.

MICHELLE CHAVEZ is an incoming freshman at the University of Maryland, majoring in broadcast journalism.

Clark Bell

The same as it ever was. Journalism informs and educates an audience. It adds context and perspective to issues that can be difficult to grasp. It is a tool, a platform, and a forum for truth (and accuracy). It can be practiced in a multilayered professional newsroom or tweeted from the privacy of one's bedroom. It helps to have an editor. It helps a lot. The best kind of journalism is rooted in research and reporting. It blooms with clear, colorful language. The same as it ever was.

CLARK BELL is director of the journalism program at the McCormick Foundation.

Bonnie Warne

Journalists consistently ask probing questions about what is happening and why, and continually seek more places to look and viewpoints to explore. The public relies on them for the information required to make knowledgeable decisions and be effective citizen participants. Within a democracy we disagree, but we negotiate those disagreements together. There will be successes and failures, but we can acknowledge both, knowing that we have ongoing information and, with that information, the ability to renegotiate and try again. We have the freedom to direct and redirect our course. The freedom of journalism is the measure of a people's freedom. Without journalism's contributions, we cannot judge and act responsibly as we work together.

BONNIE WARNE teaches English at South Fremont High School in St. Anthony, ID.

David Cohn

I often say that journalism is a process, not a product. That process is to collect, filter, and distribute information. In a world where more information is produced in a day than anyone could consume in a lifetime, value has shifted from unearthing information to verifying, curating, contextualizing, interpreting, and manipulating it.

But to what end? We say, idealistically, that journalism is a check against power and corruption. And this is true. But I wonder if that is what journalists are really “for,” or if that is just a positive consequence of something else. If journalism is only for these noble goals, then what is the purpose of journalism that doesn't check power and expose corruption? The journalistic process still applies, but stories about new businesses, cultural events, even real estate can help a community talk to itself. Whether the community is defined by geography or interest, members of human tribes must communicate to have internal cohesion and to coexist with other tribes. “Social media” is the latest buzzword, but media has always been social. To be a journalist is to collect, filter, and distribute information that serves as social glue for a community.

DAVID COHN is founding editor of Circa, a startup that is creating “the first born-on-mobile news experience.”

Chris Hayes

Journalism is much more a thing that someone does, than journalist is a thing that someone is. All kinds of people can practice journalism, the way all kinds of people can write novels or build decks. And like those practices (novel writing, deck carpentry), there is a wide range of quality in how people practice journalism. The best journalism is truthful, compelling, furthers our understanding of our world, gives citizens the tools they need to self govern, challenges us to think more clearly and rigorously about the assumptions that guide our understanding of society, and functions to hold people in power to account.

CHRIS HAYES is editor at large of *The Nation* and host of *Up w/Chris Hayes* on MSNBC.

Judy Moore

As a young person, I asked a lot of questions that were followed by my opinions about those questions. My mother nurtured both the asking and the opining by encouraging me to write everything down, which later evolved into my capturing stories with a camera. By the time I got to junior high school, journalism was an obvious fit. But as much as I tried to tell stories as they were, I saw everything through the eyes of an African-American female. Is that journalism?

Growing up in DC during the 1970s and '80s, the news involving African-Americans was rarely positive. Thus I've spent my life questioning the validity of bias. Journalism should be a vehicle that disseminates facts and information—and it is. But the reality of who decides what news gets released and how, is plagued with bias.

Very few of my students, most of whom are African-American, watch the news. They simply don't feel that it's for them. Unfortunately, I can't say I totally disagree; yet I encourage them to seek out some news daily to ensure they are informed about the world around them. Every year we analyze *Soldiers Without Swords*, Stanley Nelson's documentary about the evolution and decline of the black press, which highlights the need for African-Americans to tell their own stories. This sparks strong opinions and connections among my students about the information reported in the news today. While they are very expressive in their poetry, they feel disconnected from journalism.

So what is journalism for? A better question may be who is journalism for?

DC's public schools are nearly devoid of journalism courses, despite research that shows students who take journalism in high school become better writers and critical thinkers. It was the first course cut from the curriculum at my school in 2009-10. McKinley Tech, it should be noted, was a nationally recognized blue-ribbon school in 2012. Journalism is woven into the mass-media courses that I've taught for the past nine years, but it is being squeezed out because the administration considers the content art rather than a necessary technology.

So I continue to ask: Do we want African-Americans to be viable voices in our society? Journalism should be about delivering current and factual information for and about the diverse communities it serves, without a bias. But is the absence of bias even possible?

JUDY MOORE teaches mass media at McKinley Technology High School in Washington, DC.

Peggy Noonan

I'll start out with the first thing I see in my head when I think of reporters. A reporter is—or was, in my generation at least—someone who as a little boy grew up with distracted parents or, more crucially, a depressed mother.

At the dinner table one day he mentions that last night he saw a funny car parked in front of Mrs. McGillicuddy's house. His mother comes alive at this, or at least seems interested. “What did the car look like?” Mr. McGillicuddy has been away. That flirt Herman Smith has a '58 Chevy.

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obtaining information from the media. A proposed federal shield law would institutionalize these standards.

Meanwhile, prosecutors in the Bradley Manning trial argued (unsuccessfully) that Manning, who admitted to leaking thousands of classified documents to WikiLeaks, should be convicted of espionage and "aiding the enemy" because he knew that the documents he leaked, once public, would be accessed by Al Qaeda. Had that argument been sustained, it would have posed grave dangers to the mainstream press, according to some commentators.

Journalists can't do their jobs if they can't protect their sources, and they can't do that if the government is monitoring their communication. This is why media organizations are fighting for a federal shield law. But journalists in the US need to be cognizant that allowing the government to develop a legal definition of journalism has tradeoffs and potential consequences, particularly in places around the world where the rule of law is weak and the separation of powers ill defined. A government definition of journalism in Egypt or Turkey, or even one put forward by the Security Council, could easily be used as a basis for licensing, a mechanism that would make it much easier to exclude critical voices from the public debate.

None of this means that journalists are indistinguishable from activists. In fact, the need for professional standards is even greater precisely because we are awash in information, and informed news consumers rely on media outlets they trust to sort it out for them.

But journalists need to understand that seeking to preserve their own privileged position is counterproductive in the current environment. Journalists need to fight to keep open an information space that allows them to operate and accept that within that space there will be all sorts of others using information for different purposes. It's a messy, vibrant, volatile space, full of contradictions and shortcomings. But it's a space that journalists need to defend. **CJR**

JOEL SIMON is executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists. His book, *Controlling the News*, will be published by Columbia University Press in 2014.

Accidental journalists

What happens when a bunch of outsiders with no journalism experience buy an island newspaper?

BY JANE HAMPDEN

"Land ho!" shouts a redheaded boy, finger pointing over the guardrail of the ferryboat's upper deck. His mother holds onto him with a handful of T-shirt as the 90-ton ferry churns toward the dock at Detroit Harbor. The family will spend a typical June day on Washington Island: skipping stones, eating cheese curds, and passing by the wooden storefront on Main Road with the hand-painted *Washington Island Observer* sign.

A few miles east of the ferry dock, the *Observer's* editorial board gathers in the chairwoman's family room. Tall picture windows overlook a rugged Lake Michigan shore. With coffee and lemon scones on the kitchen counter, it feels like a chatty book club until the group launches into earnest debate on a range of touchy questions: Should the paper report on an islander charged with sexual assault? Review local plays when cast members are neighbors? Respond to impassioned bird watchers who insist that "robin" and "cardinal" are proper nouns, AP style be damned?

The board members' résumés are diverse and include the owner of the ferry line, a French teacher from Princeton, NJ, and a retired NASA engineer. But everyone in the room has one thing in common: no journalism experience. Most have summer homes on the island. They agree the weekly paper is an essential, if tattered, piece of the local fabric. "We have a strong belief that community newspapers are still a very good way to disseminate the news," says

Marsha Williams, the *Observer's* treasurer, who has held top financial posts at Orbitz and Crate & Barrel in Chicago.

The 27 families that pitched in nearly \$60,000 to buy the *Observer* (and cover three part-time staffers and first-year expenses), are getting a crash-course in journalism; and not just any journalism—small-town journalism, which, as the new owners are learning, can be a funny and frustrating thing. They had clear goals when they closed the deal 18 months ago: preserve the newspaper's homespun vibe, but also report on threats to the island's fragile economy, its overburdened town government, and its shrinking school; with 60 students K-12, Washington Island is Wisconsin's smallest school district.

The experiment's catalyst is 73-year-old Lucia Petrie. Casually stylish and politely blunt, Petrie is known for raising big money. She helped lead a \$100-million campaign for the soaring Milwaukee Art Museum addition, designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. The museum is now a progressive

IF ONE MORNING
I WALKED ON
TOP OF THE
WATER ACROSS
THE POTOMAC
RIVER, THE
HEADLINE THAT
AFTERNOON
WOULD READ
'PRESIDENT
CAN'T SWIM.'

—Lyndon B. Johnson, 36th President of the
United States (1908–1973)

symbol of possibility in a city working
to shed its rust-belt image.

Petrie and her husband, Pete, a retired management consultant, first visited Washington Island 42 years ago, tent camping on a rainy night. Decades later their bright, modern home on Hemlock Drive is a family hub. Over dinner and wine two summers ago, the Petries and a few friends ruminated on the fate of the *Observer*, which had declined in quality and was up for sale. The owners, Gail and Robert Toerpe, lived several hours away in Milwaukee; instead of tackling local issues, they published musings on their grandchildren's island visits. The *Observer* had languished on the market for three years. "The conversation moved quickly to what a shame it would be to see that paper go," recalls Petrie, "and if we bought it, what we would do to make it better."

Today, Petrie is president of Washington Island Community News LLC, and its door-to-door ad saleswoman. Pete oversees the business side. They

"A '58 Chevy," says the son. "And it was there this morning," he adds eagerly, not knowing why this is important but sensing somehow that it is.

"Tell me if you see it again!" says mom, affectionately ruffling his hair.

A reporter is born.

But you asked what a journalist is. My sixth edition (2007) of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, shorter version, says a journalist is "a person who earns a living by writing for or editing a newspaper or periodical. Also, a reporter for radio or television."

That sounds a little limited and old-fashioned, though the "earns a living" part is interesting: It implies the journalist spends most of his time committing journalism, which implies he sees it or approaches it as a profession.

My try: A journalist is a person professionally engaged in attempting to gather and publish information on issues of broad public interest. He or she operates in a public forum, such as a newspaper, website, blog, magazine, newsletter, broadcast or cable network. A journalist knows and adheres to the rules and traditions of his profession; he reports within certain guidelines, such as striving for accuracy, playing it straight, not making things up. Ideally, he is familiar with the history and literature of his profession. Journalists are subject to libel and slander laws, and related laws such as those touching on issues of reckless disregard. Journalism is not a free pass. On the other hand, nobody minds if they get some extra protections because we need them and, as a democracy, cannot function without them.

You don't have to go to journalism school to be a journalist, but it's certainly not terrible and may not hurt you at all. You may be a gifted natural. But no matter whether you are academically trained or not, you have to be a pro. You have to know the rules. These rules used to be taught, and sometimes with a rough hand, by older editors and reporters. But in the past 10 years they took the buyout. No one has taken their place. No one can. This is a bigger threat to real journalism, and carries with it more unhappy implications for the future, than any new technology.

PEGGY NOONAN is a columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*, and the author of eight books on American politics, history, and culture.

David Sassoon

At its best, journalism is for guarding democracy and guaranteeing its promise of equality and justice. It is for exposing tyranny in order to stop it—tyranny that arises unavoidably in human affairs from the exercise of power, the accumulation of wealth, or the habits of hatred and corruption. How ignorant we would be without the explanatory powers of a free press, how diseased with dark secrets without its antiseptic action! No one could enjoy the duties and privileges of citizenship or be secure in their liberty without it. Isn't all this obvious?

DAVID SASSOON is the founder and publisher of Inside Climate News, which won the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting this year.

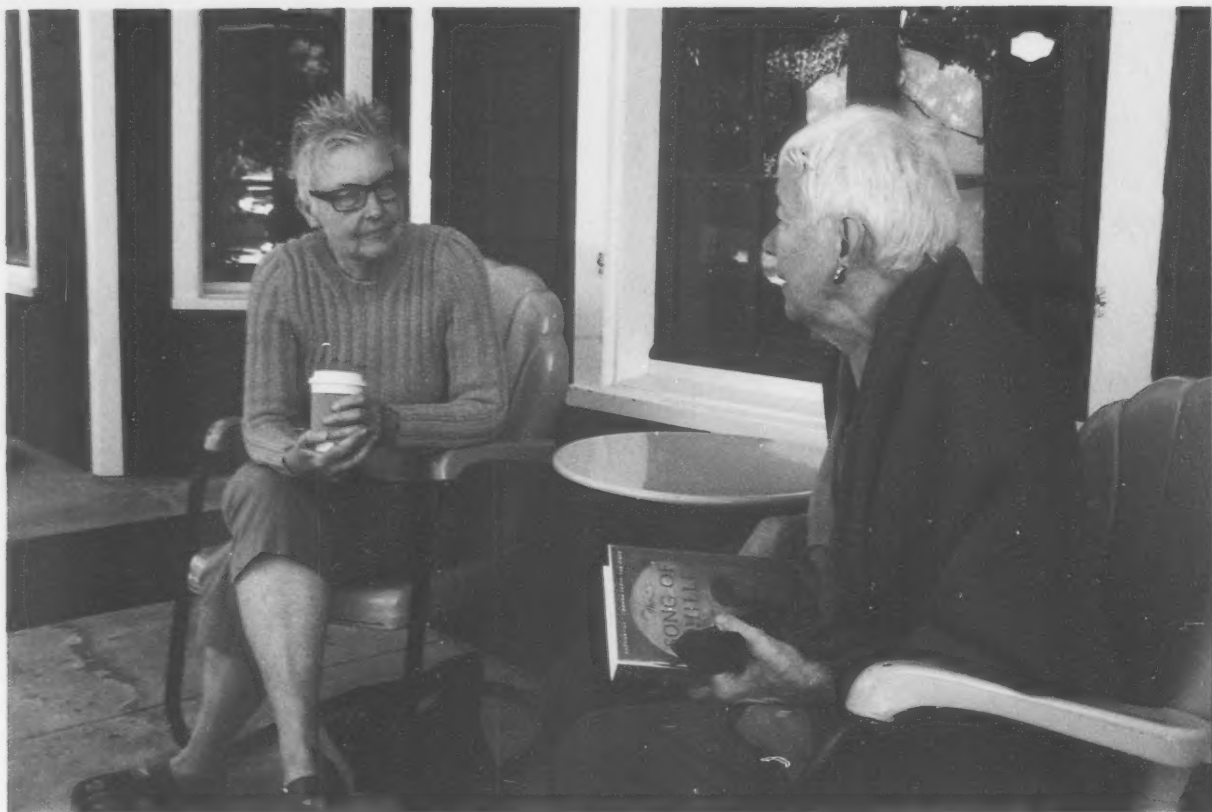
Craig Newmark

A while ago I blurted out that "the press is the immune system of democracy." Maybe I remember civics class too vividly, but that biases me in terms of what I consider the major role of a journalist: to hold the powerful to account. We need government that we can trust, and we need good, trustworthy reporting to make that happen.

Among professionals, trust is built upon a code of behavior. That means a code of ethics, and then, the hard part—some way to hold the professional to account. I'm an outsider, a news consumer, so I can't say how that should happen, but the country needs news it can trust. We should do better as consumers, listening only to journalists who avow a code of ethics and are accountable to that code.

CRAIG NEWMARK is the founder of Craigslist and a member of CJR's Board of Overseers.

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On-the-job training Mary Marik, left, gathers news and gossip on the porch of the Red Cup Coffee House. Marik, who served as the first managing editor under the *Observer's* new owners, left her Parks Commission seat when it conflicted with her reporting.

did not need years of journalism experience to understand the challenges: boost circulation, attract new advertisers, and earn the trust of 700 year-round residents who brave the frozen quiet in winter—the “real islanders” who often roll their eyes at big-city ideas.

WASHINGTON ISLAND IS FAR FROM city life in both miles and mindset—“above the tension line,” as boosters like to say. On a map of the Midwest, it is a 35-square-mile dot in the expanse of the Great Lakes. The drive to the tip of Door County leads travelers through a hilly peninsula of cherry tree orchards and idyllic harbor towns overlooking Lake Michigan to the east, and the Bay of Green Bay to the west. At the tip, choppy waters converge in a dicey passage called Death’s Door for its toll on the wooden ships of yesteryear. The ticket booth for the Washington Island

Ferry Line is five-and-a-half hours north of Chicago, but in high season vehicles with New York and California license plates line up to board, joining bicyclists and wanderers for the half-hour boat ride. The island population swells to nearly 3,000 in summer.

Visitors are charmed by the simplicity of the place: rustic resorts, evening fish boils, and The Albatross Drive-In. There are no fast-food chains, no water slides, and no gaudy T-shirt shops. Cellphone and Internet service are spotty. The island was home to Potawatomi Indians until Scandinavian fishermen and farmers arrived in the mid-1800s.

All summer long the cheery red Cherry Train transports tourists to pristine School House Beach, a quarter moon of white limestone with sweeping views of Washington Harbor. Just a stone’s throw from the beach, the

**JOURNALISM
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TO PEOPLE WHO
NEVER KNEW
LORD JONES
WAS ALIVE.**

—G.K. Chesterton, English writer (1874–1936)

Washington Island Town Cemetery is a catalogue of island settlers: Hansen, Ellefson, Jorgenson, Andersen. The names on the gravestones are the same ones printed in the *Observer's* articles, photo captions, and advertisements: Hansen's BP Amoco; Ellefson's Dock; Jorgenson & Son Excavating; Andersen Construction. These third- and fourth-generation islanders shop, volunteer, and ride the ferry with the second-home crowd that fuels the island economy. "It doesn't matter who you are," says Lorel Gordon, 62, an island native who founded the original newspaper in 1981. "You can be the top exec of a huge company; you can be a janitor. You don't have a façade here."

Gordon launched the paper as an advertising vehicle for local businesses. She wrote articles about island characters and happenings, and the paper grew into a respected news source. "People really just wanted a connection," Gordon says. "They felt they were getting something of what was going on, and they wanted more."

Meeting constant deadlines was a lot of work, though, and Gordon sold the newspaper in 1992 to the Toerpes, who owned it for the next 20 years. Gail Toerpe describes her version of the *Observer* as "cozy," but readers chuckled at articles about the family dog and political rants from a grumpy island columnist. "If you didn't like it," says Toerpe, "you didn't have to read it."

The news void that developed during the *Observer's* "cozy" years was often filled by famously virile island rumors: who got mad at the town board meeting; whose daughter got engaged over the weekend; and on and on. "A fart on one side becomes a tornado by the time it gets to the other side of the island," says 36-year-old Town Chairman Joel Gunnlaugsson. The fourth-generation islander is a ferryboat captain with a diamond stud earring and Icelandic blue eyes that are as common as wildflowers on Washington Island.

Splendid isolation means the town provides services usually handled by a city or county: police, fire, road maintenance, garbage, utilities. So the "tornadoes" become Gunnlaugsson's problem. "When all hell breaks loose, unfortunately, everybody calls me," he says.

Ira Glass

Journalism is to document and explain what's going on in the world. The kind of journalism we do at our show also takes as its mission to entertain. On a weekly schedule, we don't think you have to sacrifice the idealistic, mission-driven parts of the job in order to entertain.

Anyone who's trying to get at the truth of a situation can be a journalist. It's not fucking rocket science. Talk to people, write down or record what they say, use good judgment in picking quotes and evaluating the overall truth of what's happening. Try to summarize it interestingly for others. A kid can do it.

IRA GLASS is the creator and host of *This American Life*.

Marc Ambinder

Your plane crashes. You tweet a picture of survivors stumbling away. You've just become a reporter. You've told us what happened. Anyone can be a reporter today. Technology has dissolved the line between newsgatherers and news subjects. All the world's been deputized.

But journalism belongs several echelons above reporting. It often requires withholding information in the service of understanding it better. Journalists resist the demands imposed on reporters by the marketplace and the audience. They are detectives. They gather reporting. They build cases. When they publish or broadcast, they force us to consider what's going on and not merely to notice or accept it. Journalism holds powerful interests accountable because its output interrupts lazy, instinctive, and tribalist thinking. The best thing a journalist can hear is, "Wait, what?"

The world is a blur. Journalism is a superconductor.

MARC AMBINDER is a contributing editor to *The Atlantic*, *The Week*, and *GQ*, and senior contributor to *Defense One*.

Errol Morris

People say that journalism has radically changed in the last 10 or 20 years; that it has been transformed by the Internet, social media, cellphones, and digital cameras. We have access to more data than ever before—not only existing data but the additional data that we all are constantly producing; there really is data being shared everywhere. But let's not get confused. There's a difference between the availability and sharing of data, and journalism.

Abu Ghraib is a perfect example. Technology made the exposure of the Abu Ghraib scandal possible. By 2003-2004, small, lightweight, digital cameras had become ubiquitous. It was possible to store hundreds of digital images on CDs and use the Internet to transmit them around the globe. The generals and colonels realized what was happening. They tried to collect the images of abuse and burn them. Burn the CDs; burn the cameras. It was almost comical. They just didn't understand that things had changed.

But the traditional function of journalism—assessing what is true and what is false—has not changed at all. Just because we live in a sea of information doesn't mean we no longer need to figure out what the information means. And for that reason, journalism has become more important than ever.

ERROL MORRIS is a filmmaker whose movie, *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons From the Life of Robert S. McNamara*, won the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 2004.

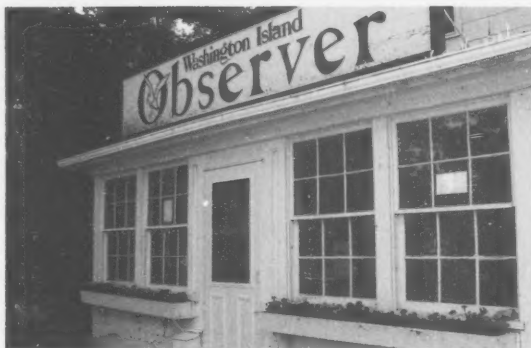
Francis Kpatindé

Beyond being a beautiful job, journalism is a state of mind. It is a school of modesty that requires a good general knowledge, openness to others, strong analytical skills, and a real ability to question its own certainties and what may appear to the general public or mandarins as evidence. It is not easy to meet all

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Tornado watch

The *Observer's* new owners try to balance 'real journalism' with the reality of life in a small town.



THE CIVIC STORMS ARE INTRIGUING TO Mary Marik, 68, who signed on as the *Observer's* first managing editor under the new owners. She served on the island's Parks Committee and, before retiring, worked as a copy editor at a think tank in Washington, DC. With her spiky silver hair and signature gray glasses, Marik quickly became the face of the paper around town. She had never written for newspapers but loved reading them, and had edited several journalism textbooks. She was fascinated with the principles of newsgathering. "There's a difference between reading about it and doing it," Marik says. "But the care and feeding of authors is a lot like keeping in touch with sources up here—talking to people, calling people."

Marik's approach to her new job was shaped by one of the first people to embrace the idea of buying the *Observer*. Rich Shereikis, a professor emeritus of English literature at the University of Illinois-Springfield, had written feature stories and movie reviews and contributed to national magazines (including the *Columbia Journalism Review*). He and his wife, Judy, purchased their cottage on Washington Island in 1996. Among the new owners, Shereikis became the "journalism with a capital J" guy, and chairman of the editorial committee. "Rich was insistent that we cover town issues so readers could understand what was happening, even if the news might upset people," Marik recalls. "He said 'news is news,' even if it wasn't comfortable."

I talked with Shereikis in the summer of 2012 on his breezy screened porch. He had been a newspaper owner for all of six months and was wrestling with the question of how to sensitively cover vexing

issues such as the shrinking school population. "I feel torn, as someone who admires real journalism," he said. "I feel like we should be doing it, but at the same time, it's different in a small town."

The new group's journalism philosophy was shaped by metropolitan dailies in Chicago, Minneapolis, and New York, and by stories on NPR. By contrast, the closest media market to Washington Island is Green Bay, and even that small city is a ferry ride and long drive away. Islanders are unaccustomed to blunt, hard-news coverage—the kind that could create lifelong grudges. Dick Purinton, who owns the ferry line and donated money for the *Observer* purchase, favors a judicious approach. His support of the venture is reassuring to many islanders—they trust Purinton, so they trust the newspaper owners. "You want to be fair and objective, and yet you can't step on toes continually," he says. "That's not going to work and it doesn't serve a long-term purpose."

So far, *Observer* articles have reflected this cautious sensibility. Marik opted for a just-the-facts approach to town business, reporting on agenda items, discussions, and votes. But she also tackled some important stories that were unlikely to offend, such as a comparison of island hotel rates, the record-low Great Lakes water levels, and the US Department of Agriculture's decision to kill invasive, non-native swans on the island.

The owners recruited dozens of volunteers to write about the Washington Island Music Festival, the Death's Door Barbecue, and the Lion's Club Ice Fishing Derby. Pictures of islanders posing with 20-pound salmon are still standard fare in the *Observer*, but the owners have tried to ratchet up the journalistic

THOUGH LIBERALS DO A GREAT DEAL OF TALKING ABOUT HEARING OTHER POINTS OF VIEW, IT SOMETIMES SHOCKS THEM TO LEARN THAT THERE ARE OTHER POINTS OF VIEW.

—William F. Buckley Jr., American author and commentator (1925–2008)

**REPORTER.
NOUN: A WRITER WHO GUESSES HIS WAY TO THE TRUTH AND DISPELS IT WITH A TEMPEST OF WORDS**

—Ambrose Bierce, American journalist (1842–1914)

requirements, especially when there is no way to stand back as a historian and no time for the necessary reflection.

As a result, journalism cannot accommodate just anyone, although it must avoid, for its own survival, becoming a caste. The immediacy and the speed specific to new media will not change those basic requirements. Rigor and accuracy will equally apply to tweets, as well as to stories published by, let's say, the Senegalese official daily *Le Soleil*.

FRANCIS KPATINDÉ is a French-Beninese freelance journalist based in Paris. From 1997 to 2005, he was the Africa Editor for *Jeune Afrique*, a newsweekly in Paris, and from 2005 to 2011 he served as the West Africa spokesman for the UN Refugee Agency, UNHCR.

Curtiss Clark

In discerning what journalism is for, it is useful to remember that it is an "ism," a belief system, and not an "ology" that we can study empirically. It is a philosophy that holds that creating an accurate record of events benefits communities and society as a whole by laying the groundwork for informed public discourse.

As with all evolving belief systems, however, there is no settled doctrine or orthodoxy on what journalism is for, and there is evidence of this muddle across all media platforms today. Still, these five journalistic purposes hold true for me:

- Journalism is for the community, serving its needs and interests above all others.
- Journalism is for those navigating change—sometimes devastating change—who are in need of a rudder.
- Journalism is for those who don't understand the question or the answer.
- Journalism is for the satisfaction of the curious and the vexation of the complacent.
- Journalism is for telling the truth of ourselves, to ourselves.

CURTISS CLARK is editor of the *Newtown Bee*, in Connecticut.

Ben Smith

Journalism now is for what good journalism has always been for: telling people things they didn't know about the world, answering questions, and telling your readers everything you know and everything you can find out. Online media took a bit of a detour during the "search era" into tricking machines, but now we're back to informing and delighting humans. And the transparency of the social Web means we can see what questions our readers are asking, and they can tell us what they think of our answers.

BEN SMITH is editor in chief of BuzzFeed.

Sebastian Junger

A journalist is someone who is willing to disappoint himself with the truth.

SEBASTIAN JUNGER is an author and journalist.

Uesugi Takashi

Journalists used to be conceived as mediators between all sorts of dominions and the 'ordinary mortals,' the public. The ideal journalist was supposed to be watchdogging the powers that be. However, the real journalist has not always lived up to this ideal. In coverage of the Fukushima crisis, for instance, it's difficult to placidly declare that Japanese journalists have stood up for people's interests. With social media emerged a host of new expression platforms. As in any group or movement, there will be wheat and chaff. Who's going to separate them? I am afraid the public itself is already at work.

UESUGI TAKASHI is a journalist, author, and CEO of the Japanese media company No Border.

Michael Mason

The *Tulsa World* always portrayed Tate Brady, a founder of Tulsa, OK, as an all around nice guy, a ceaseless city booster who died in 1925. According to Brady's family, all those nasty rumors about the Ku Klux Klan were untrue. But in 2011, a guy named Lee Roy Chapman, who had never done a lick of journalism, went in search of the facts of Tate Brady's life. The ugly stuff wasn't online; it was in the New York State Library archives, and hidden away in a few boxes in Norman, OK.

Chapman learned that Brady wasn't merely in the Klan, but that his violence extended to the whole human race. Brady tortured people, beat them up, and schemed to segregate Tulsa. He helped the Klan earn a powerful foothold in the city. All these facts about Brady had been sitting there for nearly a century, but it took a guy like Chapman to organize them into a story.

This Land Press published Chapman's "The Nightmare of Dreamland: Tate Brady and the Battle for Greenwood," in September 2011. Tulsans had been saying the name Brady a thousand times a day, when they suggested meeting in the Brady District, or going home to Brady Heights, or gathering at the corner of Main and Brady. Now, thanks to Chapman's journalism, they know that the Brady name is synonymous with violence, racism, and intolerance.

The *World*, Tulsa's paper of record, reported for years on the story of Tate Brady. But it only reported; it didn't question or investigate. The *World* would probably argue that it conducted journalism; I'd agree, only I'd give it a failing grade. Here's the kicker: Chapman had never published an article in his life. He explored Tulsa's history as a hobby. Should he be allowed to call himself a journalist, or to say he conducted journalism?

Fuck, yes. The act of journalism doesn't require a career. It requires a 42-year-old Lee Roy Chapman hunched over a 90-year-old document in the Western History Collection at the University of Oklahoma. And when that act of collection and contextualization gets refined through skill and craftsmanship, journalism takes on even greater qualities. Chapman's 3,500-word article forced all of Tulsa to address its racial divide. At its height, journalism does not simply displace power or shed new light; it is power and it is light.

MICHAEL MASON is the founder and editor of This Land Press, Oklahoma's first new-media company.

Richard Gingras

Journalism should keep us honest. Honest to ourselves. Honest to our ideals. Honest to the darker shadows of our world and our culture. Journalism should be the illuminating force within our collective consciousness, the force that challenges our widely held assumptions and presumptions. To do this effectively journalism must be about individual journalists giving us their wisest take on any situation or issue, without awkward and self-defeating notions of false balance. Let the sum total of the large conversation find its own level and balance, not in the contorted expressions of a journalist to surface the binary, both sides, in a rich, multifaceted world.

RICHARD GINGRAS is senior director of news and social products at Google.

Jesselyn Radack

My mom worked for Kitty Graham. I grew up believing that journalism meant Woodward-and-Bernstein-style ferreting out of government wrongdoing, exposing misguided and sometimes illegal policies, and cutting through doublespeak and disinformation. That ethos inspired my representation of whistleblowers, the modern-day Deep Throats.

Unfortunately, since 9/11, the majority of the mainstream media have served, at best, as stenographers, and at worst, as propagandists—especially in the national security arena. Just as troubling, journalism's overdependence and often-exclusive reliance on anonymous government officials delegitimizes stories and turns reporters into government mouthpieces. This

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scrutiny on some difficult issues, such as the plight of the Washington Island School. With 10 graduates, the class of 2013 was unusually large; there are four seniors in the class of 2014. As young families leave the island for schools with more academic and extracurricular programs, the district loses funding and becomes a bit more vulnerable.

Rich Shereikis was determined to have the *Observer* cover curricula and funding issues. He wrote about the debate over multi-grade classrooms and the implementation of Common Core State Standards, a controversial effort to standardize the core educational curriculum in every state. The paper ran interviews with school-board candidates, and published a school report card based on statistics from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. "The public needs to be made more aware because the school tries to pass bond issues every year," Shereikis said. "With little information, it's hard for the school to make a case for more funding."

School Superintendent Tim Raymond thinks the *Observer* coverage helped voters understand what was at stake in an April referendum on school funding that passed by a vote of 214-193. If the measure had failed, the district would have lost a third of its estimated \$1.2 million annual budget. "To have that information disseminated in an open, unbiased format is really important," Raymond says. "They don't make something into a flower basket that isn't, nor are they on a witch hunt."

Readers are responding. Three hundred year-round islanders and 800 off-islanders now subscribe, a 25-percent increase in circulation since the paper changed hands in early 2012. The new owners raised the price of a single copy for the first time in 20 years, from \$1 to \$2, and say they heard few gripes. The *Observer* grew to a record 28 pages last summer. "People used to complain that there was nothing in the *Observer*," says Orion Mann, whose family opened Mann's Store, the only grocery on the island, in 1903. "I think that's changed."

Another Mann brother has a less sanguine appraisal of the weekly and its owners, and his plaint underscores the nature of the challenge for the *Observer*. Keith Mann, who runs Mann's

Mercantile, says the newspaper should highlight the volatility of the seasonal economy and its effect on island businesses, many of which are for sale. He cites inherent conflict between the interests of local businesspeople and part-time residents from far-away cities. "They have expectations of having more things here like they had back home," says Mann. "They're not really satisfied with our little town as is."

The conflict is about more than seasonal demand for goat cheese and copies of *The New York Times*. Summer residents, including the new *Observer* owners, tend to support economic development initiatives that could attract more tourists to the island but also require substantial investment. A development plan for Detroit Harbor, the aging gateway to Washington Island, is a case in point. In addition to dock upgrades, a consultant's master plan calls for an inviting visitors center and marina, canoe and kayak launches, and multi-use trails linking the harbor to Main Road businesses.

In June, Marik covered a tense town meeting about the proposed improvements that drew more than 40 people, including some who derided what they view as an exorbitant price tag—upwards of \$9 million. Others argued that the enhancements would draw more tourists and jobs to Washington Island. "A lot of people who have grown up here want to keep the island as it always has been," says Rich Walker, a retired Chicago banker and *Observer* investor. "I think change is inevitable no matter what community you live in, and change ought to be managed."

The next step in the Detroit Harbor plan is for the town to seek state and federal funding. Marik intends to keep covering the story, and she resigned from the Parks Committee, which required her to voice an opinion on the harbor plan. After settling into the role of reporter, she no longer was comfortable working for the government. "I feel more free to cover stories on the island," Marik says.

THE FAMILIES THAT BOUGHT THE PAPER do not expect a return on their investment; they agreed to donate all profits to island community groups. After

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—Martha Gellhorn, American journalist
(1908–1998)

**A GOOD
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—Arthur Miller, American playwright
(1915–2005)

losing money in its first year, the paper is on track to be self-sustaining, according to Lucia and Pete Petrie, who are pleased with the evolution of their dinner-table idea. "It's changed the way islanders look at us," Lucia says. "There's a suspicion that off-island people are too big for their britches, but we've had a very warm response."

A new question on the owners' agenda is whether to publish editorials about delicate but pressing island issues. The fear, obviously, is that opinion pieces could stir up new pots of trouble. The editorial board has had to wrestle with the decision without its thoughtful chairman. Rich Shereikis was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer a year ago and died five months later at 75. His wife, Judy, wrote an obituary for the May 9 edition of the *Observer*, highlighting the great pleasure he drew from the newspaper project, and his love of Washington Island. "Rich had, in his years on the island, biked every road many times over," she wrote. "And during these past difficult months he often said that he found solace in retracing his rides on these beautiful roads in his mind's eye."

When Shereikis biked to School House Beach, he passed the town cemetery, with its hodgepodge of tributes surrounding the graves of beloved islanders. Birdhouses and lighthouses decorate headstones engraved with fishing poles and vintage cars. Clusters of daisies and daylilies crowd the headstones.

Island native Sherry Young visits the cemetery often to tend her family's graves. She worked with Lorel Gordon on the original *Observer* in the 1980s, when they ran off copies in the office of the Bethel Church.

Watering a pot of marigolds, Young reflects on the new *Observer*. She says the stories are important again because of the new owners. "It took us awhile to get used to them," she admits. "Most of the people are well educated. They perhaps have a different lifestyle from what I do. But they care about the island. I think they really do." **CJR**

JANE HAMPDEN teaches journalism at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She has presented two summer writing workshops on Washington Island at the invitation of the Washington Island *Observer* owners' group.

led to the national press' failure to scrutinize US intelligence on Iraq's weapons capabilities, the predicate for starting a war. As a whistleblower attorney, there are fewer than 10 reporters in this country to whom I will take client stories.

This journalistic subservience dovetails with an unprecedented, one-sided crackdown on "unauthorized leaks," which more often than not are whistleblower disclosures. Rather than the usual retaliation of demotion or termination, the Obama administration is prosecuting former public servants for revealing some of the biggest scandals of the Bush administration—torture and secret domestic surveillance—and is doing so under the draconian Espionage Act, a law meant to go after spies, not whistleblowers. Reporters have seemed mostly unconcerned that this chills speech and could dry up their sources. Over the past three years, I have warned in vain that President Obama's war on whistleblowers is just as much a war on journalists, whose identities litter every single indictment. Most journalists refused to consider these possibilities until it became public that the government secretly subpoenaed Associated Press phone records and obtained a search warrant for Fox reporter James Rosen's private emails—both in connection with "leak" cases.

I am heartened that the press, which has far greater institutional power than a single whistleblower, strenuously pushed back. But despite new, stricter guidelines from the Justice Department that supposedly shield reporters from being prosecuted for simply doing their jobs, Attorney General Eric Holder did not withdraw his subpoena of *New York Times* reporter James Risen to reveal a confidential source. This resulted in a disastrous appeals court ruling that eviscerates, in one judge's words, the "freedom of the press [that] is one of our Constitution's most important and salutary contributions to human history."

I hope journalism finds its way back to its First-Amendment function of informing the people about the activities of their government and fostering open discussion and debate—a critical element of public oversight. Keeping the government's secrets does not protect national security and our uniquely "American" way of life. A free, rigorous, questioning, and independent press is what is indispensable to the informed public debate that lies at the heart of a democracy.

JESSELYN RADACK is national security and human rights director for the Government Accountability Project, a nonprofit that defends public and private whistleblowers.

Michael Oreskes

Journalism is a way of thinking. It is a system for gathering and distributing information that rests on the faith that, as John Adams put it, facts are stubborn things. For journalism, authenticating facts and presenting them in a transparent, reliable, and coherent way is an end in itself. We report; society decides. What makes someone a journalist? Above all is a commitment to the integrity of facts, without fear or favor. If the outcome is more important to you than the facts, you are an advocate but not a journalist (you can be an advocacy journalist, or an editorial writer, by adhering to the facts while urging an outcome). In pursuit of the facts, journalists risk their lives in dangerous places and their careers in confrontations with the powerful. They do it because they believe their work is a service to society.

MICHAEL ORESKES is senior managing editor of The Associated Press, and a member of CJR's Board of Overseers.

Chris Hughes

When done right, journalism deepens our understanding of the world and educates us as people and citizens. It tells stories of the epic and the everyday in a way that cultivates empathy and galvanizes us to action.

CHRIS HUGHES is a co-founder of Facebook, and is editor in chief and publisher of *The New Republic*.

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To the barricades

Is it okay that Ukraine's journalists are using protests and political theater to fight for press freedom?

BY MARIA DANILOVA

One breezy morning in June, a group of leading Ukrainian journalists drove to the small village of Novi Petrivtsi, on the outskirts of Kiev, for what has become a familiar ritual: Annually, on Ukraine's Journalists' Day (June 6), the reporters approach the closed gates of the lavish suburban residence of President Viktor Yanukovich to stage a rally protesting censorship, are told their presence is illegal, hold the rally nevertheless, and then go home.

This year, as several dozen of them strode toward the giant fence that separates Yanukovich's Mezhygiryia estate from the rest of the country, some 50 beefy riot police, wearing crisp red berets and bulletproof vests, appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, forming a human barrier between the journalists and the gates. "It gets more fun every year," quipped a female journalist wearing a T-shirt with Yanukovich's portrait on the back and the words "Let's Defeat the Mafia" written in large red letters.

Next to the riot police stood Rodion Starenky, the head of the Novi Petrivtsi village council, waiting for the procession with a smile on his face and a court order banning the rally in his hand. As he has done every year, he amicably reminded the reporters that they were violating public order and congratulated them on Journalists' Day. Then he invited everybody to lunch at a nearby restaurant. "You asked for a rally of 30-to-50 people, so that's how many tables we reserved," he said timidly.

Giving Starenky a friendly pat on the

back, one journalist refused the invitation on everybody's behalf, saying that taxpayers' money should not be wasted on such meals.

Barely able to keep straight faces, the journalists asserted that they were not there to stage a protest in violation of the court ruling but, in fact, to make sure that no one else was and that the law was being properly observed. Starenky just smiled; he had heard this explanation before. One reporter asked whether holding a funeral procession would also be considered a violation of public order. After some hesitation, Starenky said it wouldn't, and the journalist suggested that perhaps next year the group could carry a coffin symbolizing the death of Ukrainian democracy.

"So how about that restaurant?" Starenky asked, even more shyly, but nobody paid any attention to him.

There is no doubt that freedom of speech is under threat in this former Soviet republic. When Yanukovich was elected in 2010, he quickly started undoing the victories of the 2005

pro-democracy protests known as the Orange Revolution. Between 2009 and 2013, Ukraine slid from number 89 on the press freedom index compiled by Reporters Without Borders to number 126. Television channels, the main source of information for most Ukrainians, have been taken over by government-friendly tycoons, leaving government critics little access to voters' TV screens. Journalists have complained of being censored, denied information, and intimidated. In May, a TV reporter and her photographer husband were beaten by pro-government activists while covering an opposition rally. Police standing nearby did not intervene.

It has become evident that the Fourth Estate has little power in Ukraine, and that the hard work of investigative reporting often is done in vain. In Western democracies, journalistic investigations exposing corruption, deception, and mismanagement by top government officials can result in scandals that cause multiple heads to roll. Not in Ukraine.

The Journalists' Day rallies held at Mezhygiryia the past three years are intended to force Yanukovich to answer questions about his residence. He admits to having privatized a modest house on a small plot of land within the 345-acre government park of Mezhygiryia outside Kiev, Ukraine's capital, but he refuses to answer questions about who has built and enjoys the mansions, gardens, and sports facilities around his property.

Documents and photographs uncovered by journalists suggest that it is Yanukovich himself, and his entourage, who occupy the entire vast territory of the park through a controversial leasing agreement and make use of a helicopter pad, an ostrich enclosure, and a floating house with marbled columns, among other displays of opulence.

Beyond the Mezhygiryia protests, Ukrainian journalists have disrupted a Cabinet session chaired by the prime minister and a Yanukovich speech at a media congress, worn Yanukovich masks to one of his press conferences, and camped outside police headquarters. One reporter (the woman who wore the T-shirt likening Yanukovich to the mafia) even broke into Mezhygiryia to photograph the luxury the president has tried to conceal from the public.

Ukrainian journalists' refusal to yield and their determination to fight for their rights have led to some significant victories. In 2011, after years of deliberations, the Ukrainian parliament adopted a freedom-of-information law that requires government officials to disclose information and documents to the public. As lawmakers voted on the bill, journalists stood nearby holding up a poster that read "Now or Never." Last year, after a series of angry protests by media representatives, including the printing of publications with blank covers, Parliament rescinded a bill that sought to criminalize libel, which was widely viewed as an attempt to crush independent journalism.

The assault on the two journalists last May was followed by days of protests. Reporters covering a cabinet session turned their backs on Prime Minister Mykola Azarov to display critical posters attached to their shirts. Journalists also set up a protest tent outside Interior Ministry headquarters. As a result, more than a dozen Kiev police officials were investigated for alleged negligence during the attack. Authorities in Donetsk offered police protection to journalists covering demonstrations. And Yanukovich was forced to condemn "those who raised their hand on press freedom," albeit nearly two weeks after the incident.

Still, questions are being raised within the media community about the actions of some of the protesters. Are their theatrical tactics undermining the cause they're defending?

In Ukraine, as in the rest of the former Soviet Union, journalism has become a largely discredited trade. After decades of press manipulation and propaganda under the Soviets, there is little trust among Ukrainians that journalists would actually dare to—or even want to—expose the authorities' malfeasance and hold them accountable. Paid-for stories promoting politicians and companies, disguised as news, are widespread, further undermining the media's credibility.

So what kind of message are the country's top journalists, already viewed with suspicion, sending to the public when they turn a presidential press conference into a sideshow? When they

Tolu Ogunlesi

Once upon a time journalists were gatekeepers, controlling and often monopolizing access to news and newsmakers. The Internet and social media have now broken the walls in so many places. To be a journalist today, one must understand how much things have changed.

Where once people consumed whatever they were given, they now have to be given what they would like to consume. The attention once paid to imperially deciding what is news and what isn't must therefore now be devoted to understanding audiences and their needs: for the dots to be connected in a world overloaded with information; and for 'news' to be packaged for communal, not individual, consumption.

And yet this is not about pandering to keypad-wielding mobs. To be a journalist today, one must understand how much things haven't changed. The rules—fairness, balance, scrupulousness, responsibility—ought to remain immutable.

TOLU OGUNLESI is a Nigerian journalist, poet, and author.

Stephen B. Shepard

More than ever, quality journalism is what matters—on whatever platform, using whatever technology, done by anyone who has the ability.

I mean a journalism vital in this era of information overload and media fragmentation. Original stories you wouldn't think of asking for on Google. Relevant stories that engage communities. Important stories with in-depth reporting, deep understanding—and on our best days something approaching wisdom.

Perhaps our children will get this wisdom delivered on a wireless information appliance implanted in their brains. So be it. But even as the medium changes, the human need for thoughtful journalism in a free society will never go away.

STEPHEN B. SHEPARD is a former editor in chief of *Businessweek*, and the founding dean of the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism.

Wenxin Fan

I am a firm believer that every person can be a journalist. Who has never once told an accurate story? But obviously, not everyone is a journalist. The value of journalism is equal to the cost of achieving that accuracy in the sea of information. Not everyone has the time, resources, and willingness to find original sources or run fact-checks. Journalism is therefore the quality control for information. What happens on social media can only be called journalism when those practices and values become standard on Twitter and Facebook.

WENXIN FAN is a reporter with Bloomberg News in Shanghai.

Matt Welch

Want to circumvent, at long bloody last, the tedious, multidecade debate over who is and isn't a journalist? Repeat after me:

Journalism is an activity, not a profession. It may be a calling for many of us, but that doesn't mean it isn't a legitimate side-hobby for many millions more, including (shudder) those who don't share our basic set of sourcing traditions or political assumptions. Journalism is writing headlines and ledes, sharing photographs and jokes, discussing politics, advancing conversations, providing eyewitness testimony and independent verification. We're lucky to live in a time when so many are doing what we love.

MATT WELCH is editor in chief of *Reason*.

Chris Miller

The job of a journalist is to present accurate information to the public about events that are believed to be in said public's interest. The word *journalism* carries a certain weight that I equate with integrity. This weight includes the work that has been done to research the facts in such a way that, when reviewed by the public,

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Just the facts? Journalists hold blank sheets of paper during a protest on October 2012 against censorship near the Ukrainian Parliament in Kiev. The press has resorted to public rallies and political theater to challenge government curbs on free speech.

insult and mock officials, what does that say about the good manners that they are trying to teach to the government? For instance, a prominent journalist accused the deputy prime minister of “unforgivable impudence” for refusing her an interview and fumed about his “smug, plump face on billboards.”

The unorthodox tactics are defended by Serhiy Leshchenko, Ukraine’s star investigative journalist. Leshchenko co-founded the movement “Stop Censorship!” which organizes the annual protests at Mezhygiryia, and he wore a Yanukovych mask to the president’s news conference earlier this year. He says that defending media freedoms through conventional ways is a luxury only established democracies can afford: “We are defending ourselves to the extent that journalistic freedoms are being encroached on. All our protests are within the law. We don’t block roads or

throw ourselves under the (presidential) cortège.”

Not everybody agrees. “Some of my colleagues look for alternative ways of putting pressure on the authorities, and without realizing it, they are turning from journalists into public and even political activists,” said Sergiy Sydorenko, a political reporter with Ukraine’s leading daily newspaper, *Kommersant*. “Such things are hard to reconcile, because an activist is a person who is by default interested and involved in the process, while a journalist must be impartial.”

The rally outside Mezhygiryia was a strange blend of journalism, activism, and satire. The journalists had planned to send a radio-controlled micro helicopter over the fence into the presidential estate, to provoke a reaction from the authorities, but they could not find one on short notice.

After the nonprotest protest ended, it was time for a photo session with the riot police in the red berets. A young reporter in a dark-blue miniskirt stood playfully next to the burly law enforcers as her giggling girlfriends snapped a photo. Nearby, a husband and his wife held hands and jumped high into the air, with the somber police behind them. Finally, everybody crouched or sat down on the ground for a collective photo. One journalist looked coquettishly into the camera in her flowing pink dress; a cheerful young man half-lay on the ground, as if posing for a beach photo. Everybody smiled for the camera.

“Happy Journalists’ Day!” someone yelled after the photograph was taken. The group responded, “Hooray!” **CJR**

MARIA DANILOVA has covered Ukraine for The Associated Press since 2007.

can be counted on to be the truth, or the beginning of a road that should lead us to truth. This is a high bar, as "truth" can have its own versions, depending on the subjective nature and context each individual brings to information.

This is why a great deal of the public has been drawn to "pundit journalism," which echoes in a loop between pundit-journalists and their audience. This feedback loop serves all parties on its surface by reinforcing entrenched ideas for a specific audience and its specific "news provider."

But is there an audience that wishes to have its worldview challenged consistently, and a support structure for journalists to deliver the kinds of provocative, fact-based stories that do that?

If the answer to these questions is yes, then we must first accept that there is more than one version of the truth. A soundbite we often hear is, "You are entitled to your own opinions, but not your own facts." At face value, this seems obvious. But though many of us would like to believe that the definition of facts and truth are absolute, they are not.

If we accept this as fact, it is likely to lead to the most effective journalism: deeply researched stories that come as close to the truth of an event as possible, delivered through a point of view. This is similar to the greatest works of literature or film, which have moved society to think of the world differently by finding creative ways to tell stories that certain audiences thought of as absolute in their facts or feelings, but came away from those stories feeling very differently about the same facts and feelings. The best we can hope to accomplish is to provoke an audience to thought, within their own world and at their own speed.

CHRIS MILLER is a filmmaker. He was the executive producer of *Undeclared*, which won the Academy Award in 2012 for Best Documentary.

Michael Stoll

When my news organization applied for nonprofit status three years ago, we hewed closely to the suggested legalistic description of our purpose: "To promote the instruction of the public on subjects useful to the individual and beneficial to the community." While newsrooms might sound silly bending their mission statements to conform to IRS rules, the agency would be wise to include "journalism" as a synonym for "education," which qualifies for tax exemption. New nonprofit organizations doing investigative and accountability reporting should be encouraged to assume the community's public-education role, as the shrinking commercial press strays into sensation and entertainment.

MICHAEL STOLL is executive director of the San Francisco Public Press.

Nat Hentoff

There have been times in our history when the purpose of journalism was to inform the citizenry of the urgent need to act before we were no longer a self-governing republic. The first example was in 1798, when President John Adams led Congress to pass the Alien and Sedition Acts. Awakened by the press to this turning of the First Amendment upside down, the new Americans denied Adams his second term as president.

But never before in our history than right now have the media been more needed to keep demonstrating to Americans how close we are to losing our most fundamental individual liberties to the Obama administration, which ceaselessly ignores the quintessential separation of powers. In the July 12 *New York Times*, Randy Barnett, a professor of constitutional law at Georgetown University, underscored Obama's abuse of "the fundamental constitutional principle that the sovereign people must be the ultimate external judge of their servants' conduct in office..."

"Congress and the courts must put a stop to...these surveillance programs [and] danger...to the rights retained by the people."

But how can this happen unless journalists persistently stay on this story and reveal the mounting un-American facts that demand that We the People seize accountability and restore the Constitution?

NAT HENTOFF is a journalist, novelist, historian, music critic, and civil libertarian. He writes about jazz for *The Wall Street Journal*.

Yasemin Çongar

A journalist is first and foremost a questioner. We ask. That's the most important thing we do. Before all the highbrow analysis, instant commentary, or in-depth reviews, there are simple, straightforward, spontaneous, sometimes unashamedly naïve, and often-mundane questions.

For a journalist, questions should come before answers, for it is only by asking that we dig deep into the shining surfaces of the well-manicured, ready-to-print statements we are so often presented.

Everyone wonders. Everyone suspects. Everyone believes there is more. But not everyone is in a position to ask. Journalists are. It is our job to give voice to the silent questions that breed in the minds of everyone. Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? These are magical words. They have been a journalist's best tools for centuries, and they still are in the digital age.

YASEMIN ÇONGAR was a founding deputy editor in chief of *Taraf*, a crusading Turkish newspaper. She now lives in Istanbul and writes for *T24* and *Al-Monitor*.

Sid Bedingfield

Digital production and networked communication allow anyone to create content and disseminate it widely. In this environment, we should consider journalism as an approach to content creation. Those who employ the journalistic approach strive to produce content that helps users understand and navigate their communities. This approach is characterized by rigorous research and verification, the fair presentation of competing ideas, and a commitment to independent inquiry that follows the facts, challenges the facile, and engages with complexity and ambiguity. The journalistic approach is not limited to those who identify as journalists. It is the act of informing and enlightening that defines content as journalism, not the actor who created it.

SID BEDINGFIELD is visiting professor at the University of South Carolina's School of Journalism and Mass Communications.

John R. Macarthur

I hesitate to say that journalism is for fun, since hardly anyone doing it is having fun anymore. Nevertheless, I find few things in life more enjoyable than rocking the boat to the water line—when one of my stories or columns provokes outrage in powerful people. Unpaid blogging has taken a lot of the fun out of our trade, so I will add the caveat that journalism should also be remunerative. Only then will there be enough serious journalists—not just journalists who take themselves too seriously—to properly inform a public starved for authentic revelation.

JOHN R. MACARTHUR is president and publisher of *Harper's Magazine*.

Carroll Bogert

A journalist in India once told me that, 'Here in my country, we can name, but we cannot shame.' If that were really true, why did he bother going to work in the morning? It sounded like the definition of journalism not achieving its purpose. People who hold power will be tempted to abuse it, and generally what prevents them from doing so is the fear of exposure and disgrace. Embedded in the purpose of journalism is its craft: strong stories, well-told, that make people pay attention. Otherwise, it's just another tree falling at the printing plant.

CARROLL BOGERT is deputy executive director for external relations at Human Rights Watch.




Ideas + Reviews

ESSAY

False fronts

The Act of Killing shatters Indonesia's sense of itself

BY MICHAEL MEYER



In the early hours of October 1, 1965, a group of junior officers in the Indonesian military assassinated six generals and threw their bodies down a well. Their coup attempt was crushed by nightfall, but the murders became the opening scene in the founding of present-day Indonesia. The senior surviving officer, General Suharto, accused Indonesia's Communist Party of being behind the killings, and, in the words of historian John Roosa, an authority on these events, "orchestrated an extermination of persons affiliated with the party." This was the height of the Cold War, and Indonesia had the largest communist party outside of a communist country, with affiliates ranging from labor unions to intellectuals to peasant farmers. In the name of saving Indonesia from the threat of Marxism, the army and its affiliated militias carried out one of the largest mass killings of the 20th century, executing 1.5 million suspected communists in less than a year. By March 1966, Suharto was running a military dictatorship that would last more than 30 years, and the story of the murdered generals was the pretext for his entire regime. "Under Suharto," Roosa explains, "anti-communism became the state religion, complete with sacred sites, rituals, and dates." Each year, Indonesian students were required to view a graphically violent, Hollywood-style dramatization of the murders. The executioners, many of them active gangsters, were celebrated as national heroes and rewarded with political power. Even after the Suharto regime ended in 1998, this power structure remained. There was no official apology or reconciliation, and the killers continued to live alongside their victims' families. The extermination of communists became as much a part of Indonesia's founding mythos as the extermination of Native Americans is a part of America's—a bit of necessary unpleasantness.

The Act of Killing, a global success on the film-festival circuit that had a brief theatrical run in the US this summer, tells the story of the massacre from the perspective of the men who perpetrated it. Joshua Oppenheimer, the film's director, encouraged former executioners to re-enact their deeds any way they wished. He filmed the re-enactments and the creative process behind them, and blended the two into a documentary in which the killers serve as both subjects and artistic collaborators. The premise sounds offensive and deliberately provocative, like some outré work of post-colonial, art-house horror. But the idea emerged organically, over nearly a decade of filming in Indonesia, as a documentary and investigative technique well suited to tell the story of the massacre.

When Oppenheimer first arrived in Indonesia in 2001, he began talking to

Ready for my closeup Anwar Congo, right, prepares to re-enact one of the hundreds of murders he committed in 1965.

surviving victims and their families. He and his co-director, Christine Cynn, lived for a year with a village of survivors in North Sumatra, working on an experimental film that became the fore-runner to *The Act of Killing*. Filming was constantly disrupted by local police or military or thugs, and they worried for their subjects' safety.

The silence enforced on the victims' families was particularly ironic when compared with the boastfulness of the killers themselves. And when Oppenheimer hit upon the idea of turning to these men for an explanation of the massacre, all obstruction ceased. He would simply ask a former executioner what he did for a living and, within minutes, be taken to a massacre sight and told horrific stories about beating people to death with bricks. In February 2004, an executioner took the film crew to a site near a river where he had helped kill 10,500 people in less than three months, then posed for pictures that look eerily like the ones that would emerge from Abu Ghraib just two months later, smiling and giving the thumbs up as the river into which he had dumped the bodies meandered through the background.

A common misconception among viewers is that Oppenheimer somehow tricked the killers and their associates into participating in the film—that he told them he was making a film that would celebrate them, or that he wanted to make them stars in an action movie. This misconception is based on the perfectly logical notion that anyone who had taken part in such an atrocity would understand the danger of admitting to war crimes on camera. But these men had never been accused of anything; they were heroes. And while Oppenheimer sometimes had to hide his disgust at the casualness, or even joy, with which the men relived their deeds, he never had to be anything but honest about his intention to make a film that highlighted their role as mass murderers.

As he continued to film, Oppenheimer became fascinated by what he called the killers' "performance of impunity" and was convinced that the image they presented in the re-enactments—more than the slaughter they were re-enacting—was the most

Oppenheimer says he wanted to 'show the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, that in turn make our reality what it is.'

compelling story of all. The suffering and oppression of the victims could tell a story about the margins of Indonesian society. But the performance being staged for Oppenheimer, by men praised for decades as the saviors of modern Indonesia, told a story about the society's dominant identity and beliefs.

In 2005, Oppenheimer began what became the eight-year process of making *The Act of Killing*. He set out to do the exact opposite of what journalism typically tries to do. As he told me in July, "Whenever you talk to somebody as a journalist, they stage themselves for you. They think, 'How do I want to be seen by the world?' And we try to get past that and extract from those interviews information that we can treat transparently. But we're throwing away a great resource. Because in the moment of someone presenting themselves, in that self-consciousness, is something also worth exposing: What is the image that they have of themselves?"

If the killers present themselves as national heroes, and this idea has become central to Indonesia's sense of itself, and a way to legitimize its power structure, then understanding that façade is crucial to understanding the massacre and the corrupt system that grew out of it. The point of making a film that focused on this artifice, Oppenheimer says, "was to show the stories we tell ourselves about who we are, that [in turn] make our reality what it is. And to put reality through a kind of prism whereby all these different narratives that make up the surface are visible." The re-enactments trace the imagining of mass murder to the self-image of a society, using the words of the killers themselves to make that seemingly remote connection horrifyingly apparent.

OPPENHEIMER FILMED WITH 40 EXECUTIONERS before he met Anwar Congo, the main subject of *The Act of Killing*, and the man with whom he would refine his

use of re-enactment as a documentary technique. Introduced at the beginning of the film with a title card that reads simply, "Executioner in 1965," Congo is a corpse-thin, grandfatherly figure with a mischievous smile. His paternal air is heightened by the constant presence of his protégé, Herman Koto, a comically fat gangster and paramilitary leader who, while too young to have participated in the 1965 massacre, embodies its legacy.

One of the most-feared death-squad leaders in North Sumatra at the time of the massacre, Congo killed as many as a thousand people using nothing but a length of wire, a club, or a machete. His response to Oppenheimer's challenge was to cast himself as the hero in scenes inspired by the Hollywood genres he enjoyed in his youth. By allowing Congo to indulge in this absurdity, Oppenheimer learns far more about both the man and his society than he ever could have learned from hours of interviews.

In planning sessions for their re-enactments (much of the film is composed of conversations that take place as the killers are preparing for scenes), Congo and Koto talk excitedly about the opportunity to use the film to project themselves into history. The scenes they create for Oppenheimer will form the basis of "a beautiful family movie," Congo says, one that gets at the truth of his youthful exploits. A film that dwells on such brazen artifice could easily lack humanity. But one thing *The Act of Killing* makes clear is that cultivating a public image is an action as quintessentially human as killing. While Congo never comes across as likeable, there's something disturbingly relatable about his vanity and delusion. We're drawn in by his need to be remembered, to be liked by the camera.

Reviews in the US of *The Act of Killing*, while mostly positive, typically lurched from one shocking thing that Congo does or says to another. In one scene, for instance, Congo describes

exiting a screening of an Elvis musical, "still in the mood of the film," dancing across the street to a paramilitary office, and "killing happily." In a sequence of surreal film-noir scenes that layer fiction upon reality upon fiction, until the viewer is unsure what's real and what's theater, Congo and his fellow executioners dress in suits and fedoras and take turns playing victims and killers, choking each other with wire—a method they learned from Hollywood that became their go-to technique. At one point, Congo's neighbor, who has volunteered to play an execution victim, tells the cast of killers gathered on set that he has a story that might fit with the plot. He explains that his stepfather had been abducted and murdered during the middle of the night, and that as a young child he went out the next day with his grandfather to find the body and bury it at the side of the road. "I promise," the man says repeatedly during his story, "I'm not criticizing you."

The killers smile and nod throughout, as if only pretending to listen, and then declare his scene too long and complicated for the story they're trying to tell. Back to filming now, the killers prepare to choke the man with wire.

An important part of Oppenheimer's approach was to screen a rush edit for the killers and film their response. One might expect Congo to be concerned about his image when he watches a scene of himself demonstrating how he choked his victims, but his only worry is his wardrobe. "I never would have worn white pants," he says. "I look like I'm dressed for a picnic."

As the film progresses, Congo and his friends slip, in Oppenheimer's words, further "down the rabbit hole of self-invention." And this reveals the effectiveness of Oppenheimer's theatrical method as an investigative technique. Watching the re-enactments leads the characters to suggest new and more elaborate re-enactments, the filming of which requires them to dig more deeply into their pasts "both as they remember them, and as they would like to be remembered." As Oppenheimer notes, "The most powerful insights in *The Act of Killing* probably come in those places where these two agendas radically diverge." Not only did the re-enactment

process capture confessions of crimes that had never been recorded, but it provides insights into the minds of the perpetrators as they attempt to take moments of unimaginable cruelty and mold them to fit their understanding of themselves and their society.

THE FILM IS NOT SOLELY INTERESTED in the past, though, nor does it limit itself to the minds of its subjects. In an ever-widening attempt to explain themselves, the killers take Oppenheimer to see some of the most powerful figures in Indonesian society. And these men, rather than attempt to be more subtle or media savvy than the executioners who worked at their behest, amplify the performance of impunity.

We meet a newspaper publisher who was secretary general of the anti-communist forces that participated in the massacre in North Sumatra, and who actually used his newspaper's building as a base for the killings. He takes Oppenheimer's cameraman on a tour of his office to see the photos of him with prominent Indonesian politicians. He then confesses casually to using his newspaper as a mouthpiece for anti-leftist propaganda—"My job was to make the public hate them," he says—and to ordering torture and execution. Near the end of the interview, Oppenheimer presses him on a detail of how the executions were carried out. "Why would I do such grunt work?" he responds. "One wink from me and they're dead."

In another scene, we visit a gathering of Pancasila Youth, a paramilitary group that grew out of the massacre and remains active in Indonesia. It claims 3 million members and runs a nationwide network of gambling, racketeering, and extortion operations with tacit approval from the Indonesian government—or at least the approval seems tacit, until Oppenheimer films a government official donning the organization's orange-an-black fatigues and courting members with a rousing speech that includes lines such as, "We need gangsters to get things done," and, "Beating people up is sometimes needed."

The farther up the chain we go, the more we understand that Congo's image of himself as a hero is not just the delusion of a sociopath, but a fantasy that

pervades the highest reaches of Indonesian society. One of *The Act of Killing*'s most horrifying scenes takes place not at the site of a mass grave but on the set of a talk show in North Sumatra. Congo and his friends are invited on air to discuss their glamorous foray into filmmaking, and then are praised for developing the choking technique that became a "new, more efficient method for exterminating communists." The peppy female host stresses this line, at which point the audience bursts into applause.

WHILE THESE POWERFUL MEN ARE THE closest we get to obvious villains in *The Act of Killing*, the film doesn't go out of its way to frame them as such. There's no cut to an interview with a persecuted political opponent to sharpen our reaction to the one with the newspaper publisher. Congo is never confronted by his victims' families. What's more, *The Act of Killing* contains little in the way of historical context. It doesn't attempt to explain which portion of guilt should go to the Indonesian military that masterminded the killings, or to the Western governments that gave them direct aide to do so, or to the thugs like Congo who did the garroting and stabbing.

The film's lack of moral handholding makes many people deeply uncomfortable, but this ambiguity is the key to its power. Without a binary of victims and villains, the viewer is unsure whom to root for or against. Indonesians aren't offered an affirmation or a rebuttal of the façade being presented, and so they can't fall back on their past assumptions when deciding what to think about the film or its characters. Outside of Indonesia, this moral complexity helps explain why *The Act of Killing* has managed to shock audiences that, after a century of unfathomable violence, have become inured to the notion of death squad leaders doing horrible things in distant lands. Shock at the killers' performance of impunity—an emotion expressed by critics and audience members worldwide—is inextricable from shock at the original deed itself. The concept of mass murder is woefully unsurprising to the average news consumer, but seeing it celebrated without any counterbalance from the victims' perspective presents a messy moral

universe, one that audience members themselves must resolve, since the film doesn't do it for them.

Oppenheimer says his film helps expose the "dramaturgy" of journalism; it says something not only about the storytelling structures through which Congo and his peers process reality, but also those through which journalism processes reality. There is a similarity between journalistic storytelling and Hollywood narratives that present a tidy moral universe of good guys and bad guys, and conflicts that are resolved by the end of the story—a narrative structure that's as artificial as the façades it pretends to circumvent. It's become a stock criticism of Oppenheimer's approach to say that he risked reinforcing the killers' version of events, but journalistic efforts to get around a façade often end up trapped within the same parameters of debate established by the artifice. A film about the massacre that presented long-suffering victims and unrepentant killers would have played into the same simplistic logic that had already made most Indonesians uninterested in examining the situation.

Oppenheimer understands the appeal of this kind of story. "Within that narrative structure," he says, "is both a legitimating sense that we are rational and good in contrast to the evil being exposed by the piece, and also the notion that we are hearing something for the first time, reinforcing our own sense of innocence." The real exposé, he contends, is in showing us things we already know, stories we've heard or told ourselves many times, "and forcing us to say, 'I knew that. Oh, shit. What does it say about me that I knew that?'"

While it's far from a Hollywood ending, Congo's participation in the film brought him to a similar self-realization. In the film's final scene, Congo is shown on a rooftop where he performed many of his executions. He launches into yet another self-justification to the camera, but then stops short and begins to gag. He tries to compose himself, then gags again, a frightening mirroring of the victims he strangled in this very place.

Whether this moment is an act of contrition or just one more performance is debatable, but the debate is sort of beside the point. Congo's

Shock at the killers' performance of impunity is inextricable from shock at the original deed.

reaction represents a realization that the massacre could be seen as something other than an act of heroism. Oppenheimer's interpretation is that the moment shows Congo "choking on the terror that comes when you look at the abyss between yourself and your image of yourself." Defining journalism as an effort to expose that gap seems highly compatible with more traditional notions of journalism's mission.

Maybe the most interesting thing about *The Act of Killing* is that it has forced this realization not just on Congo, but on Indonesian society broadly. It's hard to imagine a work of traditional journalism having a similar impact on a nation. Oppenheimer says the film has come to Indonesia like the child in *The Emperor's New Clothes*, exclaiming that "the King is naked." It has presented the story of the massacre so forcefully, and in the words of the killers themselves, that this gauzy national myth is now a reality that demands a reckoning.

While *The Act of Killing* has since been shown publicly in Indonesia, the editors of *Tempo*, the country's largest newsmagazine, watched it at a closed screening in Jakarta in 2012. The magazine's reporters and editors had never before addressed the killings from the perspective of the victims, but the film inspired them to send 47 journalists across the country to gather evidence. On October 1, 2012, *Tempo* published a double issue on the massacre. According to Oppenheimer, this "set the tone for the Indonesian media. And now the country's leading historians, filmmakers, artists, writers, educators, journalists, and human-rights activists are saying 'We have to deal with it.'"

Writing in *Tempo*, one critic said,

"*The Act of Killing* is the most powerful, politically important film about Indonesia that I have ever seen. The arrival of this film is itself a historical event almost without parallel."

Indonesia is still a long way from launching a truth-and-reconciliation commission, let alone of purging the government of the corruption that continues as a legacy of Suharto's reign. But, in a societal if not yet practical sense, the country is immeasurably closer to seeking justice than it was before *The Act of Killing* was released.

The film's Indonesian co-director, who, like much of the crew, must remain anonymous for his safety, has made perhaps the most eloquent argument for the film's unusual technique and its impact. In a statement released with the film, he wrote:

Through the imaginations and recollections of mass murderers featured, I understand, with particular clarity, how one of the devices of the old regime is still working so efficiently. It is the 'projector' that keeps playing, on an endless loop, a fiction film inside every Indonesian's head. People like [Congo] and his friends are the projectionists, showing a subtle but unavoidable form of propaganda, which creates the kind of fantasy through which Indonesians may live their lives and make sense of the world around them; a fantasy that makes them desensitized to the violence and impunity that define our society.

What are the degrees of separation between indulging, ignoring, and exposing artifice? *The Act of Killing* challenges journalists to answer that question. The answer doesn't lie in buying theater makeup and fedoras, but in a journalism that is patient and subtle enough to trace belief to action, and action to belief. It requires a journalism of the imagination that interrupts and reinterprets the stories already playing on an endless loop in our heads. Some of these stories we assume to be reality, and others we assume to be bullshit, but in either event they are stories we've been told—and have told ourselves—so many times that we lost the urge to examine them. **CJR**

MICHAEL MEYER is a CJR staff writer.

In the name of the father

An editor who soared, then flew away

BY MIKE HOYT

HERE ARE SOME OF THE THINGS AND people that my father loved: Gregorian chant, Joe Louis, airplanes, the Detroit Tigers infield of the mid-1930s, Salem cigarettes, Martin Luther King Jr., Latin, and big northern lakes. "That's not a lake," he would say, whenever I used the L-word about some muddy little man-made body of water, "that's a pond." Once, we drove all night from Missouri to vacation at Torch Lake, in Michigan, where he had experienced some happiness as a boy. I was in the front with him when we arrived, exactly at dawn, the rest of the family slumbering in the back of the wagon, a golden sun fingering across the blue water. He had tears on his face.

Another thing he loved: reporting. He was in awe of how good reporters find things out—interesting and significant things to be shaped into news, analysis, argument. He believed that journalism has a moral center, and that its motor is honest, independent reporting. Doing that reporting—asking questions of strangers—was not his cup of coffee. But he was an editor, and he didn't have to.

My father's claim to fame is that, nearly 50 years ago, in the fall of 1964, he and some colleagues set in motion a lively newspaper that covers the Catholic Church and its tidal pull on the world, from an independent and intelligent lay perspective—a paper that

changed the rules for covering religion and remains an influential voice.

One of his favorite stories was how that newspaper got its name. In the late 1950s, he was the editor of *The Kansas City-St. Joseph Register*, the local Catholic weekly, which at the time was yoked to a dreary national chain. This was an era of great ferment in the church—not to mention the world—and he and his

I've been tracking his footprints, trying to draw a bead on him as an editor and a man.

staff asked Kansas City's bishop to let them get ambitious and go independent. It was not easy to speak truth to religious institutional power back then, but the bishop consented, and in his enthusiasm, even came up with a name: *Veritas*, Latin for *Truth*. My father hated it. A newspaper that offered church-sanctioned perspectives was pretty much the opposite of what he had in mind. *Veritas*, he told the bishop in a moment of inspiration, means the same thing as *Pravda*. We can't have *that*.

So the paper got the name my father wanted: *Catholic Reporter*. In 1964 the local weekly gave birth to a national edition, the *National Catholic Reporter*, with an emphasis on all three words. My father would run NCR for seven years before they chased him out. It was a heady time for all of us.

Like a lot of people, I had a complicated relationship with my dad. He was a good father in the early innings but faded later and then quit the game, heading for New York with a new wife, leaving my mother and six young children behind. I was the oldest. My mother regrouped with the three girls, two of them younger than us teenage boys, who grew up more or less like weeds. I remember driving with friends through the city one night in search of one of those machines that take four photos for a dollar. The idea was to document my nose—gloriously broken and bloodied in a (short) bar fight. I recall thinking that this might be the kind of thing that fathers and sons have a little talk about, if a father is available. He wasn't. We reconnected, but not fully, in his later years, after I chased him down. He died in 2003, at 81.

Still, of course, he's *here*. I have been tracking some of his footprints lately, trying to draw a bead on him as an editor and a man. And I wish I could find the slug of lead he gave me as a kid—my name typed out on a Linotype machine, right in front of my awestruck eyes.

THERE ARE A HANDFUL OF BOOKS THAT touch on my father's career, and I managed not to read any of them until recently. I found them fascinating. The one I enjoyed most is *Once a Catholic*, published in 1987 by Peter Occhiogrosso. It's a series of interviews with a range of Catholics—Mary Gordon to Bob Guccione, Jimmy Breslin to Frank Zappa, Christopher Buckley to my dad, Robert G. Hoyt—about how the religion shaped their lives and work. Reading Occhiogrosso's book on a warm afternoon in my backyard, I could almost hear my father's tobacco-cured voice.

He was 65 at the time, still sharp and witty. He described how his own father died when he was five, and how his mother then sent him and his older brother, Jim, to boarding school while



Independent NCR rose to 100,000 circulation in its first five years. Foreground, editor Robert Hoyt, holding the paper, and publisher Donald Thorman. In back, Tom Blackburn, James Andrews, Art Winter, and Robert Olmstead.

she trained as a beautician. She finally set up her own beauty shop, but the Depression killed it, and possibly her too. She died in 1936, when my father was 14. More than one family offered to adopt the orphaned brothers, and the choice fell to the pastor in Gesu parish, Detroit. He opted for a family with financial resources but without a desire to bring more children into their home. And so, my father continued a life in institutions—more boarding school; then the seminary (he thought he might become a priest, until he reconsidered celibacy); then the Army Air Corps, where he learned that he was not cut out to be a pilot (landing trouble). Along the way, he got a strong Catholic-school education.

He once told me that life is 95 percent luck, and as luck would have it, he got discharged from the Army in Denver

and landed a job there with the National Catholic Register—a vast, centralized journalism factory that produced local Catholic newspapers on an economy of scale. As he told Occhiogrosso, copy would arrive from places like Wheeling or Fresno or Cincinnati, to be edited, typeset, laid out, printed, and mailed. While he was beginning to become an editor, his education continued, too—Register employees were required to take grammar classes, plus theology. Another bonus: He met my mother on the copy desk.

Whether they were a good match is a large question, but my parents did share influences and a spiritual fervor mixed with a social/political fire. Long story short: They married and, together with several colleagues, started a daily newspaper with a progressive Christian perspective, a sort of precursor to the NCR.

They wound up in Kansas City (where they had located a favorable bishop), on the ragged southeastern edge of town, in an abandoned three-story stone farmhouse that they got cheap, and where I would grow up. The first issue of the newspaper, *The Sun Herald*, was printed on October 10, 1950, and mailed (or teletyped) to subscribers, of which there were never enough. The paper folded in less than seven months.

My father scrambled—he sold brooms and drove a taxi before landing a teaching job—until 1957, when he became the editor of Kansas City's diocesan paper, *The Register*, soon to be decoupled from the chain and become the *Catholic Reporter*. As luck would have it again, the church at the time was starting to crank open its big medieval windows, which, in the papacies of John XXIII and Paul VI, would

manifest itself in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and lively doctrinal controversies. There was a lot of news, and the *Catholic Reporter* crew wanted to perform on the national stage. Kansas City's next bishop, Charles Helmsing, gave the idea his blessing and support. The editors rounded up a few hundred contributors in Kansas City and hired an Associated Press reporter named Bob Olmstead. I remember my father marveling at how the man just called people up and they told him things.

Bishop Helmsing, my father told Ochiogrosso, had "agreed to more than he thought he was agreeing to. He said that he agreed to our being independent, but he added, "Of course, you will accept my guidance." What he meant by that was that if he didn't like it, we wouldn't print it, and what we meant was that we'd listen and then decide, because we were independent and we were set up corporately that way."

In a few years, perhaps inevitably, they would clash. NCR's orientation was mostly liberal, politically and theologically, but that was not the problem. The paper was reporting and commenting on debates within the church that some thought should stay behind church walls, on such subjects as birth control, celibacy, the males-only priesthood, Mary's perpetual virginity, and Pope Paul VI's re-statement of Catholic belief, which NCR called a "creed for yesterday" in an editorial. The last straw may have been an essay by the philosopher Daniel Callahan calling for a reconsideration of papal authority, titled "How to Get the Papal Monkey off the Catholic Back." Helmsing publicly condemned the paper as "poisonous" and asked the editors to remove the word "Catholic" from the masthead.

It stung. My father explained, in print, that NCR was a free and independent newspaper that did not speak for the church but reported on it. And, as he would write later, in an introduction to a collection of NCR articles: "The church needs critics more than it needs press agents." And in yet another essay in response to the bishop: "This is a newspaper, not a pious journal. It does not pretend to meet all the spiritual needs of its readers; its preoccupations are with issues in the church that can be treated

in political terms, and it quite deliberately adopts a vocabulary that cannot be confused with the saccharine and submissive language once considered the mark of Catholic loyalty."

AMONG THE MATERIAL I FOUND FOR this piece is a 24-page pamphlet from 1963 (15 cents at the time) that my father wrote for the Paulist Press, called *The Christian in the Modern World*. I would not burden anybody with it except that it says something about his core. The essay begins with a reference to a passage from the gospel of St. Matthew, a warning from Jesus as he holds a child in his lap and tells the gathered crowd: "See to it that you do not treat one of these little ones with contempt; I tell you, they have angels of their own in heaven..." The child is nameless, and the point, my father argues, is that he stands for every child, for Everyman. The lesson he draws: Man is worthy of reverence. *Res sacra, homo*—man is a sacred thing.

The life and teachings of Jesus, my father wrote, "are primary data, inexhaustibly rich, only slowly appreciated, never definitively explained. Instead of detailed directives, we find core ideas, implications, hints," which, he argues, add up to something that should push us to engage a troubled world. He then moves to another nameless child, one of his own invention—this one an American child of the great black migration to the north, whose father's factory has been shut, whose mother must resort to welfare, who is shunted into an inferior school, and so forth—in short, treated with contempt, Jesus's word.

So, the Catholic newspaper my father ran would not be churchy or inward but engaged in the issues of the day. And it would get noticed.

I have a clear memory of my father on the telephone at our home, leaning into the wall, his arm wrapped around his prematurely gray head in an effort to block the noise of the children running, crawling, yammering below. His concentration caught my attention and I later asked him who had called. John F. Kennedy, he said.

I should have probed further, of course (I would have been 11 or 12). I do remember that my father told me later that the subject of the discussion had

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been federal aid to parochial schools, and I got the sense that Senator Kennedy had been persuasive. I have since wondered how this shard of memory could be accurate: Why would a US senator call some editor from a local weekly in Kansas City? It wasn't even a national paper yet.

Still, one of Kennedy's early acts as president would be to put forward a massive aid-to-education bill. It quickly got hung up on a noisy controversy

and essays—*Special to the NCR: the First Five Years of the National Catholic Reporter*—and it provides a sense of the publication's tone and range. The *Reporter* was big on Catholic-Jewish dialogue, for example, and hired a columnist, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, to write about it.

One of his pieces, parsing some barbed words from the pope about Jews and Jesus, is included in the book. John Leo has a scathing piece

which Paul VI inherited. The commission, in turn, produced a series of secret reports for the pope and his advisers, with the majority recommending change. In 1965, several of those reports were leaked to France's *Le Monde* and America's *National Catholic Reporter*. My father told Occhiogrosso that he was at his desk for 36 hours straight working on that story.

Then, in 1968, Pope Paul overrode his own commission and maintained the traditional church instruction that birth control is forbidden. The result, as the *Reporter* put it: "instant polarization." In its editorial, NCR soberly argued that the birth control issue "poses a serious question, and the encyclical does not give a serious answer." In the end, the newspaper pointed out, the debate was not about sex, but about authority.

'This is a newspaper, not a pious journal, and it quite deliberately adopts a vocabulary that cannot be confused with the saccharine and submissive language once considered the mark of Catholic loyalty.'

about aid to parochial schools. Kennedy held that such aid was unconstitutional. Catholic forces, and they were powerful, pushed for creative ways around the constitutional challenge, such as funding nonreligious parts of schools (like science labs) or low-cost construction loans. Kennedy declined to compromise, and Catholic anger likely killed the bill, a major defeat.

The ongoing story had been all over the *Catholic Reporter*—"JFK Wants No Aid to Religious Schools" (February 24, 1961); "Bishops Ask Amendment of Education Proposal" (March 10). But an editorial on the subject—initialed by my father and published March 17—was mild. It took as a starting point an editorial from another prominent Catholic paper, Boston's *The Pilot*—agreeing with much of its reasoning but not its conclusion. *The Pilot* had reasoned that if it did not include aid to parochial schools, the bill should be killed. My father called for "restraint and responsibility," and said that Catholics should accept the bill and work to amend it when it comes up for renewal. It's a position that the president might have appreciated, and, possibly, might have pre-emptively influenced.

In 1969, the paper published a book with a selection of features, editorials,

about the presentation to the American church of a useless gift from the pope—his tiara. A Gary Wills column eviscerates a folk hero of the Catholic left, Daniel Berrigan—specifically Berrigan's open letter asking for a pardon for a condemned South African terrorist named John Harris, whom Berrigan lauds because he "stands with the victims of apartheid." Harris's moral fervor, Wills points out, had spurred him to plant a time bomb at a Johannesburg train station that killed a 77-year-old woman and crippled a 12-year-old girl. There is a November 1966 first-person piece about the education of a Franciscan nun—Sister Mathias, who became active in Chicago's race-fired housing battles. The headline: "What Are You Doing Talking to That Nigger?"

No story was bigger for the *Reporter* than *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI's treatise on birth control. The church had traditionally held that "artificial" contraception was a sin; that sex was for making babies, and to remove that function was against natural law. Many Catholics, it can be said with certainty, thought this was bogus. Pope John XXIII put together a commission to study the issue, made up of lay experts and married couples as well as clergy,

IN ITS FIRST FIVE YEARS, THE *NATIONAL Catholic Reporter's* circulation rocketed from zero to 100,000 readers. In the early 1970s, though, it began to lose steam, falling to 60,000. The paper's publisher argued that it had become too antagonistic and had alienated readers. My father had a different analysis, pointing to the historical moment. Many Catholic and other religious journals were losing circulation at the time. Vatican II had created hopes that were being deflated. Good priests and nuns were falling like leaves, and a lot of Catholics were leaving the building. "Ultimately, it was not a papal warning or a threat of excommunication that drove me out," he told Occhiogrosso, "but a good old-fashioned power struggle. Circulation was falling, and our publisher, Donald Thorman, blamed it on me. Some of his criticism may have had some merit—I was tired and I was distracted by personal issues."

Those issues were his disintegrating marriage and an affair with a younger woman. I remember having the sense then, early in the 1970s, that large chunks of the earth were collapsing around our family. We were aware of my father's job difficulties, of course. (My brother and I spoke idly of stealing the publisher's decadent color television—who needs color on a TV?—in retribution.) At the same time, our

neighborhood was changing; a drive-by shooting a few blocks from our house took the life of a boy my brother knew well, right on the porch of his house. On the news, too, the world seemed to be blowing up.

Our family certainly was. My father was fired. And then he left.

He moved to New York, where he wrote and edited for *Christianity & Crisis*, a Protestant journal that closed in 1993, and then for *Commonweal*, the Catholic journal of ideas. He fooled around with a book idea that didn't happen. He adopted another daughter. He made a life. But he had no talent for not running a newspaper.

A good friend tells me that to be emotionally healthy a person needs to get in touch with his inner rage at hurtful parents. Maybe so, but for me it's a bit late for that. Perhaps I have buried it too deep to reach, anyway, though if I dwelled on the collateral damage of my father's exit, I might get closer. All of us paid a price, some more than others. Certainly my mother did. Still, she is the one who learned to build friendships and networks and community, back in Kansas City, and I'd do well to emulate her in times of trouble. I have three children myself, beautiful young adults now, and when I think of all my father missed, I feel more pity than anger. I don't get it. I never will.

But I am proud to have been influenced by his journalism.

His *National Catholic Reporter* hums along at age 49. Circulation is almost 36,000, counting Kindle, and the website is alive. This summer the paper won second place for general excellence from the Catholic Press Association, unusual only because it breaks a 13-year streak of first-place awards for the *Reporter* in that category. It garnered eight other first-place awards this year, and won first, second, and third places for editorials, my dad's old perch.

Over the years it has done groundbreaking reporting on all things Catholic, good and bad. If you want to understand the Vatican, for example, you need to read its senior correspondent, John L. Allen Jr. It treats its readers with respect. It understands that to actually be of use to a flawed but essential

institution that your readers care deeply about, you must keep an arm's-length distance from it.

In January 2013, Kansas City's current bishop, Robert Finn, echoed Bishop Helmsing from almost five decades earlier, when he again publicly asked NCR to remove "Catholic" from its masthead. Finn implied, along the way, that the paper had run afoul of all of the city's bishops since Helmsing. Thomas C. Fox, *National Catholic Reporter's* publisher, pointed out in a dignified reply that this was not true. He noted that the newspaper had enjoyed cordial relations with other Kansas City bishops, among them Finn's predecessor, Raymond Boland, who had blessed NCR's office and spoken at the paper's 40th-anniversary celebration.

And Fox added interesting context that Finn had managed to omit: Just a few months earlier, the *National Catholic Reporter* had run an editorial calling for Finn's resignation. This was just after the bishop had been found guilty in Jackson County criminal court, for failing to report suspected child abuse

by a priest who liked lewd photos of little girls.

The editorial was not subtle. It pointed to Finn's weak apology in the matter and to the bishop's abysmal management. "The chancery offices are in disarray, diocesan personnel feel abandoned, and the clergy are either angry or dumbfounded," it said. "From the very first day of his tenure in this diocese, Finn has been a source of division and divisiveness. He does have supporters, but he has never won even a grudging respect from the majority of active Catholics."

Fox knew all that from his paper's own reporting, in an 8,600-word piece about Finn's rough reign that ran in 2006, written by Dennis Coday, who is now the paper's editor. My father's brand of journalism lives on. The word *Catholic* remains on the masthead, right next to *Reporter*. **CJR**

MIKE HOYT, CJR's executive editor from 2001 to 2013, teaches at Columbia's Journalism School and is the editor of *The Big Roundtable*, a startup that is a home for narrative writing (thebigroundtable.com).

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CUNY



What's next? E.J. Graff, left, is the author of *What Is Marriage For?*; Steven Petrow is a columnist for *The New York Times*.

CJR EVENT

At the altar

The national conversation about same-sex marriage has shifted. What are the challenges now for the journalists who cover it?

ON JUNE 12, TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE Supreme Court, in separate rulings, struck down parts of the Defense of Marriage Act and California's Proposition 8, CJR convened a panel to discuss coverage of same-sex marriage. "We Now Pronounce You..." was hosted by the Newseum in Washington, DC, and sponsored by the ACLU.

Moderated by CJR's Minority Reports columnist, Jennifer Vanasco, the panel included E.J. Graff, the author of the book *What Is Marriage For?*; Steven Petrow, a *New York Times* columnist and former president of the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association; David Fontana, an associate law professor at George Washington University; and Chris Geidner, a senior political and legal reporter at BuzzFeed.

The panelists speculated on what the then-unknown outcomes of those cases might be (both a section of DOMA and all of Prop 8 were ultimately ruled unconstitutional), but the bulk of the conversation was devoted to questions about how the media should cover the issue, and the relationship between media coverage and public opinion. The following quotes are highlights of the discussion, which can be viewed in full at <http://www.cjr.org>.

The significance of labels

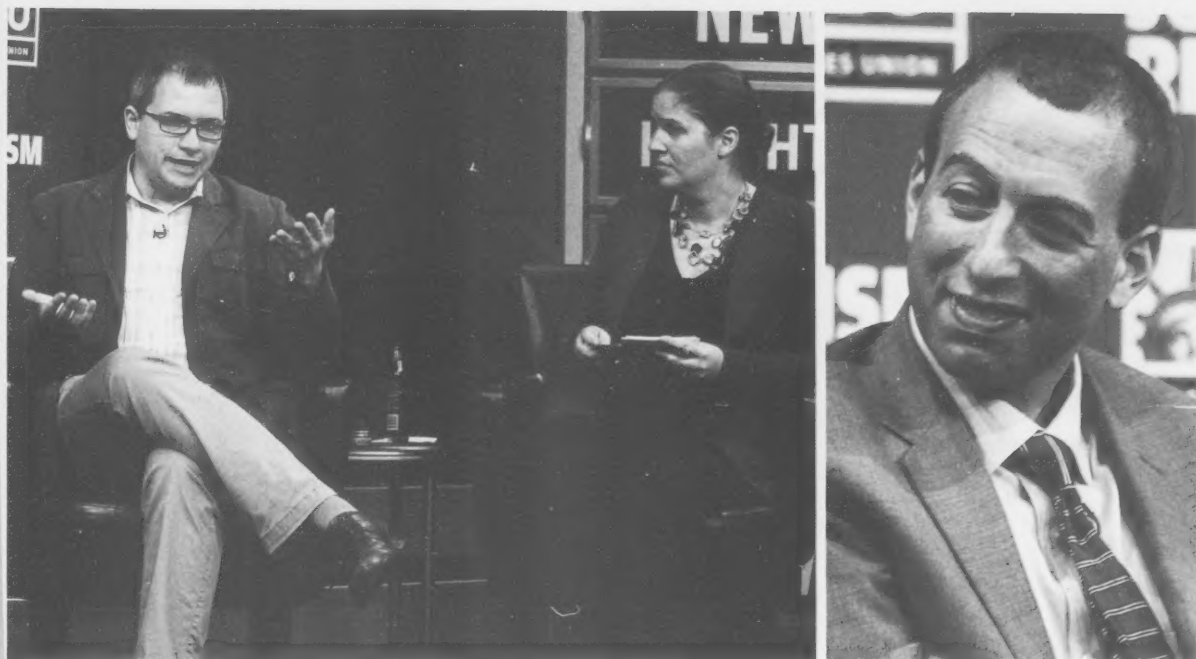
Panelists spent a decent chunk of time discussing different ways to refer to two men or two women getting married.

"Whenever I hear it called 'gay marriage,' I just imagine people thinking only of gay men," said Graff. "That

absolutely drives me crazy, especially since lesbians out-marry men, like two to one." Indeed, while the numbers vary by state, a 2011 study by Lee Badgett and Jody Herman of the Williams Institute found that, in the eight states that provided them data by gender, 62 percent of same-sex couples who sought legal recognition were married women.

While they didn't unanimously agree on an alternative to "gay marriage," the panelists largely agreed with Graff's critique that the phrase contains too strong of a gender implication. Yet, as Petrow pointed out, a Google search for "gay marriage" returns far more results than a search for "same-sex" marriage. He partly blames the media for not agreeing to use a more neutral term sooner. "I think if we look at 'global warming' versus 'climate change' and the kind of difference that might have made to our discourse.... I think it would have made a big difference, too, had we been more successful in adopting a different language around this," he said.

"When you look back to the '60s," he added, "it was 'interracial marriage.'"



Talking points BuzzFeed's Chris Geidner, left, CJR columnist and panel moderator, Jennifer Vanasco, and law professor David Fontana

Now those are considered 'marriages.' I'm sure we'll be at that point, but we're not there yet."

As Graff observed, this kind of shift is the reason "traditional marriage" is a useless term. "What we tend to call 'traditional marriage' now is the 1950s marriage," she said, "but the 1950s marriage was, in fact, a radical shift from just 100 years before."

A sea change

Throughout the discussion, the panelists expressed a sense of wonder at how quickly, and drastically, popular opinion of same-sex marriage has shifted. A CBS News poll published in March found that 53 percent of Americans believe that same-sex marriage should be legal, whereas only 39 percent think it should be illegal. According to the same poll, 33 percent of those who think it should be legal "once held the opposite view."

Petrow recalled that, "As late as the early '70s, you had major newspapers like the [New York] *Times* using 'invert' and 'pervert'" to refer to gays and lesbians.

Graff placed the latest dramatic shift

in public opinion in the late 2000s: "Something happened, and it seemed as if the whole country went, 'Eh, why would anybody be against it?' Like, overnight," she said. "And the news media at pretty much every level was part of that shift."

David Fontana, of George Washington University, noted a shift from moral logic being employed by opponents of same-sex marriage to its use by proponents. "Marriage equality is a claim about what's right and what's wrong," he said. "In 1996, when Congress passed [DOMA], it said, explicitly, that this is meant as moral condemnation. If you watched the oral arguments in the Supreme Court in March, the lawyer defending [DOMA]—he's defending it because we need equality in federal law, because the sociological evidence is still unresolved."

Embarrassed opponents

The shift toward overwhelming support of same-sex marriage in the US has left those who oppose it reluctant to air their views, panelists said. "There are a lot of people who have changed

positions on the issue and are embarrassed about their past statements," said Chris Geidner of BuzzFeed. He later added that, "We had staff looking for statements from members of Congress supporting DOMA or supporting Prop 8. Literally, I think we found three out of 535 members of Congress."

Graff, meanwhile, noted that the moralistic tone of the debate has prevented journalists from understanding all sides. "In the media, there is a complete lack of understanding of what the opposition might be," she said. "I do feel that people are having trouble stepping back and seeing another frame."

To Petrow, however, the moral weight of the issue is too powerful to resist. He read a statement from Thomas Roberts of MSNBC that defends public activism by journalists: "I don't believe it is biased to support equality. I think it's an American value."

Petrow amplified Roberts' point: "I think with that statement you get someone who, like me, is defining [same-sex marriage] as a civil right and not a political issue."

—Christopher Massie

Original sin

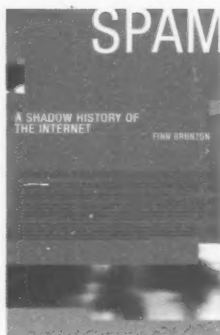
The creation of email spam and its threat to the promise of the Internet

BY JUSTIN PETERS

IN APRIL 1994, TWO IMMIGRATION LAWYERS from Phoenix ruined the Internet. The US government had announced a Green Card lottery, and Laurence Canter and Martha Siegel realized there was money to be made in persuading applicants to let their firm handle the paperwork. Rather than erect a billboard or paint their faces on a bus-stop bench, the two chose a novel method of advertising their services: They posted an unsolicited message to every single newsgroup on Usenet, a collection of online discussion boards that predated the Web. "Green Card Lottery—Final One?" read the subject line of their message, which went on to encourage readers to contact Canter and Siegel for all their Green Card procurement needs. It was perhaps the first commercial mass mailing in the history of the Internet.

The Internet was not amused. Its sputtering users took revenge against Canter and Siegel, sending the lawyers thousands of irrelevant emails and crank-calling their office. Today, a similar advertisement wouldn't seem like such a big deal, but for Usenet participants in 1994 it felt like a home invasion. Usenet was a community, they maintained, and Canter and Siegel had disregarded community norms by posting an unwanted, off-topic solicitation to every group in the network.

Despite the furor, Canter and Siegel refused to apologize for their actions.



Spam: A Shadow History of the Internet
By Finn Brunton
The MIT Press
270 pages
Hardcover \$27.95

(Quite the contrary: They wrote a book titled *How to Make a Fortune on the Information Superhighway*.) The idea that Usenet was a community was ludicrous, they said. It was just a network, and the two of them were merely exercising their right to free speech, and they certainly weren't going to be censured by a bunch of "wild-eyed zealots who view the Internet as their home."

You could call it a stalemate, but it wasn't, really. As Finn Brunton puts it in his fascinating new book, *Spam: A Shadow History of the Internet*: "[T]he effect on Usenet was devastating. Canter and Siegel forced the hand of the

network, and it did not have much to put up [in its defense] aside from telecommunications attacks, social intimidation, and plaintive appeals for good behavior." It would be inaccurate to say that Canter and Siegel brought about Usenet's decline. But they certainly were among the first to demonstrate the fragility of the unspoken social compact that its users took for granted.

Other commercial messages soon followed. Canter and Siegel had invented spam.

Brunton tells this story in the first chapter of his highly readable history of electronic flotsam and the efforts to stop it, and he puts it up top because it's a story that remains relevant to the modern Internet. Canter and Siegel's message was a harbinger of all the irrelevant crap that would eventually overwhelm the Internet—the Viagra emails, the get-rich-quick scams, the crazy or abusive run-on comments, the disposable "news" produced by content farms such as Demand Media. Usenet's outraged but impotent response to Canter and Siegel presaged every attack waged against banks and corporations by hackers. And the flood of spammers who followed Canter and Siegel's example reminds us how hard it is to control user behavior on a decentralized network.

Since the days of Usenet, network users have worked to build online communities that are interesting, productive, and collaborative. Concurrently, bad actors have been working to destroy these communities—not necessarily with malicious intent—by persistently presenting their members with information that they do not want. This tension is familiar to anyone who has ever scanned an online news outlet's comments section. And it's a key to understanding how the Internet really works.

Books about the Internet tend to focus on its good parts: how it has and will continue to transform news, commerce, education, and personal relationships. But the Internet story is just as much one of annoyances and distractions, of the grating, stupid ephemera that attempt to capture your attention by tricks and misdirection. To intelligently discuss how the Internet might lift us all up, we first have to understand how and why it weighs us down.

WHEN PEOPLE TODAY TALK ABOUT turning a website into a "community," they generally mean something like Usenet in 1994: a group of people with similar interests gathering for informal, potentially productive conversations. Usenet was a lively, intelligent, and clan-ish collection of discussion groups devoted to thousands of single topics, from baseball to cyberpunk.

Usenet's "community" status also derived from the fact that many of its users shared similar real-life experiences: They were computer enthusiasts and/or university affiliates who had invested a lot of time learning to access the service. In short, they were nerds; many were fans of Monty Python, the absurdist British sketch-comedy group, and took every opportunity to profess their fandom. "A lot of people who didn't have a clue what to do to create conversation would just... recite entire *Monty Python* routines verbatim," remembers one informal historian whom Brunton quotes. "A particular favorite was the 'spam, spam, spam, spammy spam' one because people could just type it once and just use the up-arrow key to repeat it. Hence, 'spamming' was flooding a chat room with that sort of clutter."

"Clutter" is an apt term. Like the discarded clothes that accumulate on the floor of a teenager's bedroom, making it hard to find the car keys, spam accumulates online, hindering access to salient information: the personal email that gets lost among hundreds of junk messages, the well-researched article that Google buries in favor of content-farm drivel. Brunton describes spam not just in terms of unwanted ads, but as a mindset: "The word 'spam' served to identify a way of thinking and doing online that was lazy, indiscriminate, and a waste of the time and attention of others."

In the early days of digital networks, those distractions were fairly benign. Endless Monty Python routines might be annoying, but they're not actively malicious. But as the general public discovered the Internet in the mid-1990s, "spam" came to refer to unwanted email solicitations: oddly punctuated missives promising easy money or longer-lasting erections. Entrepreneurs would send millions of messages in hopes of eliciting a few responses from naïve or

distracted users who might actually believe that some deposed Nigerian prince would reward them if they helped him transfer some funds. The opportunity cost was low, and the potential rewards were high. Spam was everywhere.

Brunton traces the growth of email spam and introduces us to some of the most prolific spammers: "a few high school students, a failing Neo-Nazi, an ex-MIT artificial intelligence (AI) graduate student currently in hiding." He uses a Tennessee-based spammer named Rodona Garst as an archetype of people who approached the Internet not from a standpoint of what they could give to it, but what they could get from it. I think Garst, who sent billions of spam messages before leaving the industry amid lawsuits, also represents those millions of ordinary people who were discovering the Internet in the mid-to-late 1990s through services like AOL, which made getting online as easy as running a floppy disc that came in the mail.

But things that are easily acquired are generally not held dear. Early Usenet participants had to deal with rudimentary machines, slow connections, and nongraphical interfaces in order to participate. This fostered a sense of mutual ownership, and this sense of ownership helped foster a sense of community, a sense that they were all in it together. The millions of point-and-click AOL users would never have described themselves in those terms. They were customers of a subscription service, not collaborators in a mutual enterprise.

Garst and her colleagues shared Canter and Siegel's mindset. And as the Internet has grown, that mindset has only become more prominent. Near the end of the book, Brunton argues that "spam" now encompasses all sorts of efforts to "exploit existing aggregations of human attention," from email solicitations to mindless social-media chatter to business strategies from billion-dollar corporations. Brunton analyzes the search-engine-optimized, mostly worthless content produced by places like Demand Media and AOL, and likens it to Canter and Siegel's output. "There is something in the disposable and opportunistic nature of the material produced, and the mingling of automated and human infrastructure used

to produce it," he writes, "that seems similar—a cynical project to monopolize the conversation and commandeer the space of relevant information."

AND THAT'S THE POINT. SPAM, in whatever form it might take, is something that doesn't listen, that only wants to talk at you. The spam mentality rejects collaborative dialogue and hard-won wisdom in favor of ease and expedience. And little by little, as that sort of behavior is normalized, the Internet changes. There are fewer opportunities to listen, learn, and collaborate; more people shouting to be heard. Until all you've got left is an infinite space filled with infinite pitchmen, incessantly cutting one another off and changing the subject, like some *McLaughlin Group* episode that never ends.

Any community—online or off—will fail if it's dominated by bad actors who reject dialogue and monopolize conversations for their own selfish ends. The true value of *Spam* lies not in its analysis of email advertising—though the analysis is expert—but in the way Brunton eloquently extrapolates the story of spam into a broader framework for understanding why the digital commons is so vulnerable. "Spam" is very nearly the perfect obverse of "community," he writes. "Whereas 'community' stands in for our capacity to join one another, share our efforts, sympathize, and so on, 'spam' acts as an ever-growing monument to the most mundane human failings: gullibility, technical incompetence, lust and the sad anxieties of male potency, vanity and greed for the pettiest stakes—the ruin of the commons for the benefit of the few."

A coin has two sides, neither of which can exist without the other. There is no heads without tails; there is no open Internet without spam. If we are to preserve and improve the digital commons, then we need to understand this relationship much better than we do; understand that the existence of spam proves the health of the network, and our inability to stop it proves the fragility of the nodes. Brunton's book explains this as well as anything I've seen. R3AD !T TODAY!!!! CJR

JUSTIN PETERS is a contributing editor to CJR.

Blurry verge

The line between democracy and a darker social order is thinner than you think

BY TREVOR QUIRK

WHEN READING TIM FINCH'S EERIE, self-conscious first novel, *The House of Journalists*, it's interesting to note the type of journalist Finch is not much concerned with. The book keeps the First World careerists—the beat reporters, the thought leaders, the human-interest purveyors, the literary journalists, etc.—far out on the periphery, even though Finch himself was one of them (he worked for the BBC). The House of Journalists is a haven in London for writers who have fled their countries, and Finch's subjects—the “fellows” at the House—are political refugees, exiles.

They have been beaten, raped, smuggled, tortured, abandoned. They have witnessed political chaos and barbarity. They have fled their countries, lost their families, and risked everything to write about it all. When they arrive at the house, all they possess, in many cases literally, is their experience, their stories, which are, the novel announces, “not just stories; these are people's lives.”

The institution depends for survival on both private and public funds, which it ensures by appropriating and sharing those stories. The novel begins in the present with the arrival of a new fellow, AA, whose experience is narrated in the ever risky second person by a portentous “house” voice. This device, though at times cloying, signals a primary function of journalism: to speak for people—for a group of refugees, for AA, for you.



The House of Journalists:
A Novel
By Tim Finch
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
304 pages
Hardcover \$26

The novel probes and questions the existence of a sort of “hierarchy of suffering.” Finch has one of his characters denounce “juxtaposition,” of all the words she could choose, in the middle of her tale of rape, degradation, and murder, as the “ugly word” she gleaned from the experience. Another character laments the veneration of human suffering: “None of this obsequious shit; this fetishistic reverence,” he says, “none of this: what-those-eyes-must-have-seen and we-are-not-worthy. We despise all that...” George Bernard Shaw expressed the core of these excerpts:

What you yourself can suffer is the utmost that can be suffered on earth. If you starve to death you experience all the starvation that ever has been or ever can be. If ten thousand other[s] starve to death with you, their suffering is not increased by a single pang: their share in your fate does not make you ten thousand times as hungry, nor prolong your suffering ten thousand times. Therefore do not be oppressed by the ‘frightful sum of human sufferings’: there is no sum... Poverty and pain are not cumulative.

Yet I think it's difficult for anyone who reads stories of such human suffering—from Rwanda, from East Timor, from Serbia, from Yemen, from Nicaragua—to accept Shaw's idealistic dictum. It all seems distinctly, oppressively cumulative. This quandary is at the center of both journalism, which is fundamentally about bearing witness, and Finch's novel.

Finch suffuses his story with chasmal distinctions between the fellows and the Westerners who harbor them. The omniscient collective voice that hovers over the characters notes many poignant differences in their language, where the meaning of a word or phrase is derived entirely from the social context and history of its interpreter. Some examples are painful. The idiom “turns the thumbscrews” is glibly employed before people who have personally known torture. Western hyperbolic usage of “spies,” “interrogation,” and “oppressive” bemuses the fellows. Expressions like “line in the sand,” “go hang,” and “smoke you out,” are radically literalized in their presence. In the eyes of the fellows, we seem to live in a spurious world of Kafkaesque metaphor.

But for all the grotesque divides between the First and Third worlds, there are much deeper connections. Hence the phrase “translates into every language more or less” is quietly applied to simple, kindhearted words: “guarantee,” “good night's sleep,” and “cherry brandy.” Moreover, humanity's shared struggle for identity is expressed most ardently by the fellows themselves, iterating basically the same universal theme: a Christian dissident dreams of the food he choked down in prison; an intractably depressed fellow feels his unease lift when he is denied asylum; a

young refugee weeps in her bed because she feels safe, only to feel alive when she is evicted out among the homeless.

Within these stories lies the strongest rebuttal to postcolonial Western guilt over the totality of suffering, which found its most terrible expression in Kafka, who has a strong presence in Finch's novel. Human beings can, in fact, forge identities from absolutely any experience; whether joyous or wretched, wondrous or mundane, we will make these stories our home. The person who has suffered more than you does not have any less of a story, or a self.

But selves are as easy to unbuild as stories are to untell. The tragedy for Finch's exiles is not their suffering, but the myth of the "fresh start." The architecture of their selves was already erected in their resistance to tyranny, witnessing of violence, and flight from oppression. As long as they are safe and free, they will yearn for their true home "every second of every day of every year," as Finch writes. (Note: This passage was in the review copy, but not in the final version of the book.)

Whereas the enigmatic AA remains in the reader's blind spot throughout the novel, we get quite familiar with the consciousness of Julian Snowman, who greatly distrusts the new fellow. Snowman, the founder and chair of the House of Journalists, is the novel's moral fulcrum. The reader can sense Finch's disapproval of this character, but also his pity, even admiration. An apprehensive, pragmatic man, Snowman has taken up the impossible task of reconciling the humanistic ideals of his institution with the capitalistic ethos of the society in which it resides. He needs to benefit financially from the institution's benevolence in order for the institution (and by extension its benevolence) to survive. Predictably, calamity ensues. The majority of the plot entails Snowman's transition from the worrisome, punctilious bureaucrat to the paranoid, liberal authoritarian who says things like: "It is not a question of stopping discussion. It is a question of questioning the value of discussion." He bans the use of the word "disappearance" after a fellow disappears, suspects AA's involvement in some vague conspiracy to destroy the house, and finally gets drunk on

What the world looks like before things get Orwellian.

power—plus literally drunk—and does and says things he will deeply regret.

At some point it becomes clear that Snowman has confused the ideals of his institution with the institution itself: "The project [...] was more important than any one individual. He never forgot this central truth; that was his great strength." The irony here, which Snowman never seems to recognize, is that if a "project" founded on liberty violates the liberty of just one individual in order to protect itself, it has betrayed its principle and is no longer worth protecting.

Summarizing his arc in this way makes Snowman sound like a caricature, which isn't fair. Snowman (note the name) has *molded himself* into a caricature, into the familiar satire of the delusive figurehead because he believes it is the only archetype that can keep humanitarian institutions financially solvent in Western society. And as far as I can tell, he's right. So is he a fool or a hero? At the novel's conclusion one is pretty certain of which, but for a while it seems like he's both.

Any novel preoccupied with heartless bureaucracy is bound to evoke a sense of futility in the reader. That evocation is particularly strong in Finch's novel, but I think it's also a consequence of another kind of futility that Finch identifies. And considering this novel's journalistic subject, it's surprising that he locates it in storytelling, in meaning itself. Again and again, characters ruminate on the nihilistic backdrop of the human theater and console themselves with the dazzling spectrum of meanings we ascribe to our experience, with how we dress against that "neutral background," with the varied stories we invent. The act of storytelling is almost never portrayed as redemptive or significant. That it is ultimately meaningless, like the gray weather the novel repeatedly describes, like the "iron-grey

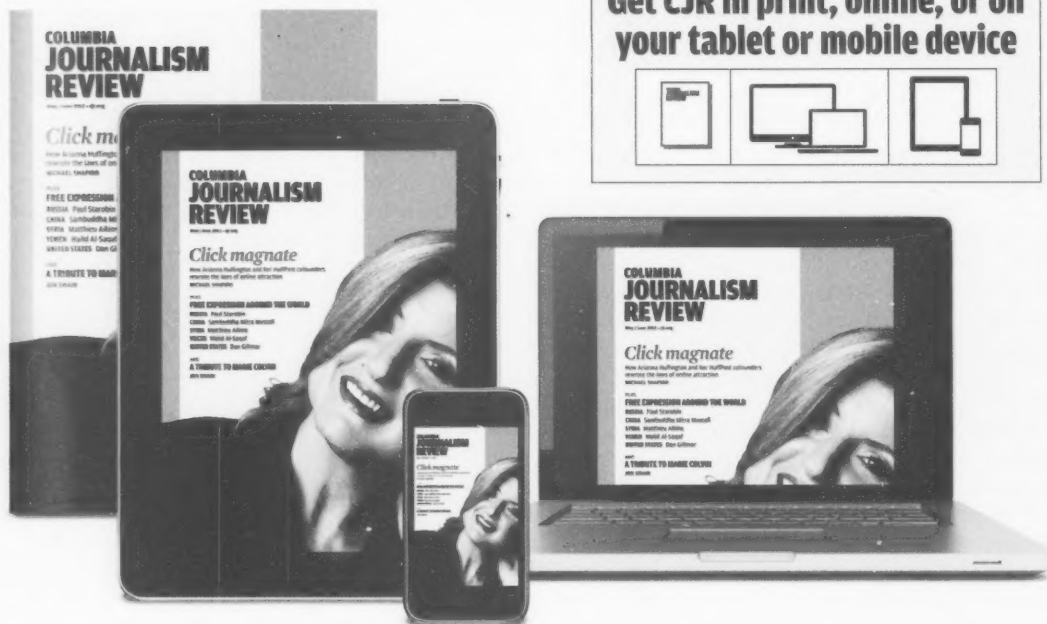
heartlessness... where the world begins and ends," simply does not register to most of us. The book is punctuated by dozens of small ledes and headlines, a structure that intimates the essence of storytelling: organizing a protean reality. Yet many of the characters—especially the writers—seem to think its essence is to *pretend* a reality, to put words to an endless, meaningless, ultimately blank page.

The book's jacket calls it an "Orwellian" novel. I think pre-Orwellian is a better designation. One reason I found this novel so unnerving is that it seems to describe what the world looks like before things get Orwellian. Nobody seems to know if it's darkly indicative that the fellows have a regimented curfew, or that the house is under surveillance, or that "daily records and files on every fellow" are kept. Both administrators and fellows claim that they are "free to come and go" enough times to make the protest suspicious. Mr. Stan, a central character who sits on the governing committee with Snowman, complains that "there is the decision and then there is *the process* by which a decision is decided upon... the distinction is a most important one... from democracy to tyranny, from freedom to oppression, is but a small step."

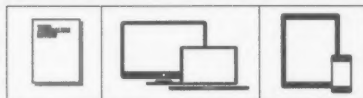
It is Snowman, the tragic herald of this political indeterminacy, who voices the strongest denial of it. As he considers the current British government: "This talk, growing in their circles, of galloping authoritarianism, of outright abuse of human rights, of the curtailment of essential liberties, of the neutering of opposition and dissent, was hugely overblown." No other character is so sure, which I don't think is accidental. This novel demonstrates that the only prospect scarier than the thin line between democracy and some darker social organization is the *blurry* line. *The House of Journalists* may have already crossed that moral threshold; even at the book's end, nobody knows. Given the present geopolitical climate, this could all very well apply to *our* world. Imagine that. Here we could be, all of us, on the blurry verge. **CJR**

TREVOR QUIRK is a writer living in Saratoga, NY. Find more of his work at trevorquirk.com.

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BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

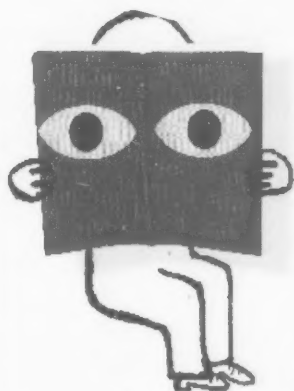
The Selected Letters of Willa Cather

Edited by Andrew Jewell and Janis Stout
Alfred A. Knopf
715 pages
\$37.50

IN 1906, *MCCLURE'S MAGAZINE*, flagship of the rampaging muckraking movement, was in deep crisis. S. S. McClure, founder and brainstorming resident genius, had always been unpredictable, but now he was out of control. To the horror of his staff, he trotted out schemes for several new enterprises that threatened the magazine's financial and editorial stability. Failing to deter him, his all-star staff, led by the legendary editor John S. Phillips, and such writers as Ida M. Tarbell and Ray Stannard Baker, decamped to *The American Magazine*.

Undaunted, McClure began to assemble a new staff from the remnants of the old, and from new talent. He hastened to Pittsburgh to summon Willa Cather, whom he knew only glancingly: In 1905, he had published a selection of her short stories and filled her head full of tales of a glowing future. In fact, she was in her early 30s in 1906, a prairie Nebraskan who had drifted east to Pittsburgh, where she had done newspaper and magazine editing and writing and had taught school. She had no national reputation.

Her letters, printed in



this big, comfortable volume, reveal the effects of her sudden promotion into the big time. As was the practice at *McClure's*, her titles and responsibilities were fluid at first. She began as a fiction editor but was soon moved to take control of a major exposé on the life and times of Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science. Another writer had assembled the material, but Cather had to recheck much of it and travel widely, even to England, for documentation. For her troubles, she was given the heavy burden of managing editor.

As she faced this prospect, she unburdened herself to a new friend, the New England writer Sarah Orne Jewett. She complained of weariness and the monotony of reading bad manuscripts. But the worst problem was, as she put it: "What Mr. McClure wants is to make me into as good an imitation of Miss Tarbell as he can." That is, he wanted brilliant articles from her on "men and measures," topics she could not manage while at the same time attending to

the details of the office. McClure, she said, thought she should be an executive rather than a writer. Half-believing McClure, she nonetheless resisted and asked: "Isn't there a new disease... called 'split personality'?"

McClure continued his old habit of deserting the office for months at a time, leaving the whole burden of its operation on Cather. She wrote to her brother: "You see a magazine is like a sick baby—you've always got to be stuffing something into its blessed insides or it dies." Although she did her best, McClure lost financial control of the magazine in 1911, and she left her editorship the following year. As a last service and out of gratitude, she agreed to help with McClure's rags-to-riches autobiography and in fact became its largely uncredited author.

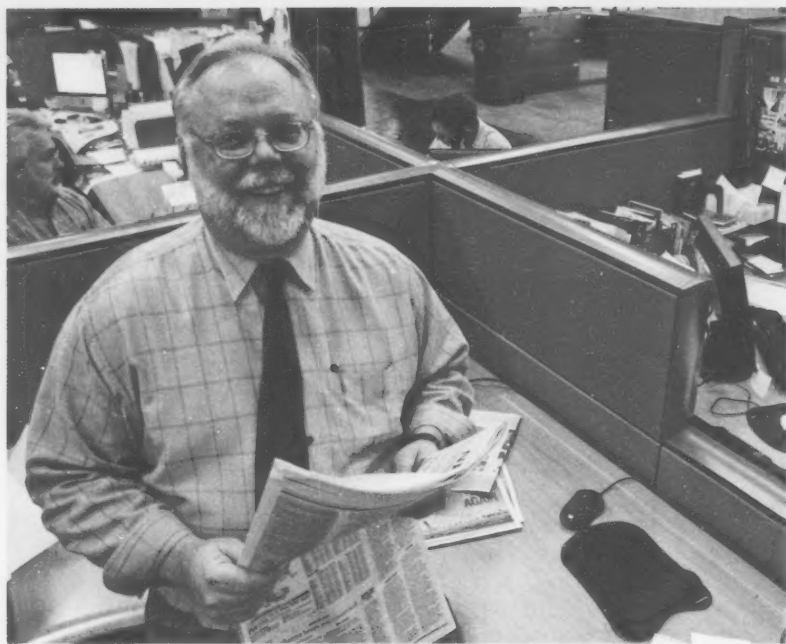
In 1912, she set her will toward her own destiny as a novelist, ultimately earning herself a permanent place in American literature with novels based, as she often said, on what she remembered or reconstructed of life on the plains and in the Southwest, such as *My Antonia* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. She apparently intended that her writings should speak for her; she often warned friends against sharing her letters and in

her will requested that they not be published.

Of course, now they are—or at least several hundred of them, skillfully chosen from a much larger number scattered through dozens of archives. The foundation that now controls her literary rights decided that, more than 60 years after her death, privacy concerns had faded and that the letters merited publication. It is hard to disagree; the letters are rich, discursive, and rewarding.

The volume's heart is family letters, addressed to the numerous Cathers who started out from Virginia and settled on a farm near Red Cloud, NE, then dispersed. There are many letters to close female friends she made over the years (but only one to Edith Lewis, with whom she made her home). As the years passed, the scope of the letters becomes increasingly professional but no less frank. As a former editor, she paid close attention to the handling of her books, down to choosing the typeface. When a publisher displeased her, she did not hesitate to hold his feet to the fire. It is appropriate that this volume was published by the one publishing house she loved: Alfred A. Knopf. **CJR**

JAMES BOYLAN is the founding editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review* and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts—Amherst.



EXIT INTERVIEW

Know your audience

In 1992, Rob Dean became editor of the Santa Fe New Mexican, the main news source in a small but cosmopolitan city. Dean, a Montana native who had previously been an editor at The News Tribune in Tacoma, WA, arrived three years after then-owner Robert McKinney won a legal battle to regain control of the paper. Dean ran the New Mexican during a period of profound media-world change, as the Internet evolved into journalism's 800-pound gorilla. The New Mexican grew during much of his time there, but in 2008, like papers everywhere, it was forced to cut staff. Dean, 59, stepped down in July. CJR's Christopher Massie spoke to Dean about Santa Fe, the New Mexican, local news in a digital age, and what he'll do next.

What about the New Mexican appealed to you when you took the job? Santa Fe is rich in history and culture and art and independent thought. It's been a political center all of its history. The *New Mexican* is the oldest newspaper in the West, and I saw the paper in the midst of a rebirth. So it was a chance to catch that wave in a community that really deserved good journalism.

How did you approach the job of understanding and helping a community, like Santa Fe, that has a complex history? My friends and neighbors have roots in the community probably deeper than I do. As journalists, we have to understand that our readers or viewers have this impulse to say, 'If only I were mayor for a day, what would I do?' We tried to respond to that not by preaching to them, but by giving them the information that empowers them to fix their own world.

What was your approach to covering the Native-American communities around Santa Fe? The Native peoples were the first settlers of our region and their presence in Santa Fe is inescapable, but it takes a concerted effort to cover them. Native communities are sovereign entities. Things like state public-records laws

'The strength of an organization is the strength of individuals.'

and federal freedom-of-information requirements are not necessarily things they embrace or have to abide by. The best way to cover Native communities is to have reporters on your staff with an understanding of those issues, which are both cultural and political.

How did you cut back your staff without sacrificing the integrity of the paper's mission? We decided to choose fewer topics to cover. We tried to define the signature qualities of Santa Fe and how we could identify beats that gave us quality coverage. We had a whole staff devoted to covering the region around Santa Fe, and we cut that back.

As a leader, how did you balance the need to sometimes say 'no' to people with the need to keep them feeling good about themselves? I tried to communicate that the strength of an organization is the strength of individuals. Their skills, values, experiences, and interests are the keys to finding and publishing great stories. I tried to give every individual a clear line of sight between his or her work and the bigger mission of the organization. That was a way to minimize office politics or squabbling or jealousy.

Why did you decide to leave now? It just felt like it was the right time. It's never difficult to serve the interests of the older, richer, whiter part of a community. I represent that. A news organization should be led by an editor who lives the experience of what it is to educate his or her kids, find healthcare for his or her family, or face the challenge of buying a home.

What's next? I'm very interested in young people and their education, their preparation to manage this world. I'm also a student of history. One of my two sons is a historian, too, and we have a book on World War I that we've been working on. **CJR**

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